University of Alberta

The Self-Sufficiency Trap:
A Critical Feminist Inquiry into Welfare-to-Work Policies and the Experiences of Alberta Families in Poverty

by

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Where thoughts come from, whence meaning, remains a mystery. The page does not write itself, but by finding, for analysis, the right ambiance, the right moment, by reading and rereading the accounts, by deep thinking, then understanding creeps forward and your page is printed.

Robert Stake[i]

Research is to see what everybody has seen and to think what nobody has thought.

Albert Szent-Gyorgy[ii]

---

[i] Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, p. 73.

[ii] As cited in Morse, J. M. & Field, P.A. (1995). *Qualitative research methods for health professionals, 2nd Ed.*Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, p. 1

For Eric
And For Morghan

Because all else pales in comparison

Abstract

Like other liberal-welfare states, Canadian policy makers, in a climate of balanced budgets and deficit reduction, have been active in developing policies intended to move people from social assistance to employment. Although programs designed to move welfare recipients into the labour force are not new in Canada, the mandatory nature of recent welfare-to-work initiatives is new. The introduction of welfare-to-work policies in Canada signals a neo-liberal shift which is moving Canada from a model of social citizenship, where all citizens are entitled to a base level of benefits, to a model of market citizenship, where citizenship entitlement is contingent upon a person's attachment to the labour market. Given that welfare recipients have a precarious attachment to the labour market at best, the shift to market citizenship may have negative consequences for their income security, and, in turn, their health and well-being. With increasing value placed upon labour-force attachment, welfare recipients are increasingly at risk for receiving fewer citizenship entitlements.

In this dissertation I detail the experiences of 17 welfare recipients over the period of one year in their quest to become productive market citizens. Using critical feminist and human ecological theoretical frameworks, I explore the interface between mandated welfare-to-work policies in Canada and the experiences of welfare recipients with preschool children. I show how welfare-to-work policies offered participants the promise of employment, self-sufficiency and social inclusion, set against the backdrop of food and income insecurity, stigma and social isolation of welfare. I demonstrate that for a significant majority of these participants, welfare-to-work did fulfill the promise -- for awhile -- mostly through increased income provided by student-finance benefits. However, this promise was short-lived, as most welfare recipients did not get the promised jobs, and at the end of the year were not economically or socially better off than before. Furthermore, I show how welfare-to-work impacted the unpaid work at the edges of a workday, what I refer to as the "work outside the work", suggesting that welfare-to-work policies do not adequately address the work/family issues of low-income families. I discuss what these findings reveal about larger social processes, positing that the trend toward active social policies which attempt to move welfare recipients to self-sufficiency will not be successful because these policies fail to adequately acknowledge and address obstacles faced by welfare recipients. I conclude by revisiting the concept of social citizenship and delineating a vision for a caring society.

Acknowledgements

Doing a PhD has been a long journey of exploration. Like the experience of a journey, this process was at times uplifting and exhilarating, and at other times, hard slugging. Throughout this process, I have had the good fortune of being surrounded by many good people who have offered me encouragement, affirmation and friendship. Undoubtedly, I could not have successfully come to the end of this journey without their support.

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Amidst the process of doing a PhD, life happens. In my case, two life-changing events occurred -- one sad, one joyous. The first was the death of my father-in-law, Ewout van Walsum in August, 2003, followed closely by the birth of our daughter, Morghan. The loss of Ewout and the birth of Morghan helped me to put things in perspective and remember that there are more important aspects to this life than work. Morghan's presence has provided me with endless joy, hope, and faith in the integrity of the human spirit.

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Chapter One
Introduction

A decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization.
Samuel Johnson

On December 19, 2002, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that a Quebec resident did not have the constitutional right to a guaranteed minimal income. Central to this case was welfare-to-work legislation, requiring welfare recipients to engage in employment related activities in order to receive state benefits. The claimant, Louise Gosselin, challenged welfare-to-work legislation in Quebec, arguing that it violated her rights to equality, liberty and security as stated in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Gosselin also argued that the Charter should be expanded to include economic security for the poor (Supreme Court of Canada, 2002). This landmark case raises critical questions pertaining to Canadian welfare reform. What are the implications of welfare-to-work policies for the economic and non-economic well-being of welfare recipients and their children? Does welfare-to-work denote a violation of citizenship rights, and what does its existence suggest about the role of the state in providing economic security for its citizens? This Supreme Court decision is just one indication of a somewhat invisible but pervasive ideological shift in Canada that is reformulating notions of citizenship entitlements, and may have significant implications for marginalized groups, particularly impoverished families.

The 1990s signaled a fundamental change in how Canada addresses income security. The trend in Canada, as in several other liberal-welfare states, has been to approach welfare reform through a market-oriented strategy known as welfare-to-work. According to this approach, welfare recipients who are deemed employable by

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The 1990s signaled a fundamental change in how Canada addresses income security. The trend in Canada, as in several other liberal-welfare states, has been to approach welfare reform through a market-oriented strategy known as welfare-to-work. According to this approach, welfare recipients who are deemed employable by government receive benefits only if they are taking steps towards gainful employment through participating in employability programs, attending school, or actively engaging in job-search activities (Gorlick & Brethour, 2001). While welfare-to-work programs have existed in Canada in one form or another since the 1970s, there was a "seismic shift" in the burgeoning nature of welfare-to-work programs in the 1990s (Peck, 2001a).

To historically contextualize the introduction of welfare-to-work programs, I present a brief synopsis of the development of the welfare state in Canada. The economic hardship experienced during the Great Depression in the 1930s triggered Canadians' recognition of their collective risk and laid the groundwork for the development of the postwar welfare state in Canada. Yalnizyan (1994) points out that the "shiver of universal risk had swept over everyone, and people started demanding protections by pooling that risk across society" (p. 31). Within this context, Leonard Marsh (1943) wrote the *Report on Social Security for Canada*, outlining a blueprint for a society based on shared risk and responsibilities. Over the next two decades, programs such as employment insurance, family allowance, old age security, universal healthcare and education, and social assistance sprang from this notion of collective risk and responsibility (Armstrong, 1997). Although far from perfect, these programs offered a basis for social rights in Canada. As Armstrong (1997) states:

> Certainly the programs had flaws and many failed to fulfil (sic) the stated objectives. Some perpetuated inequality while others ignored such objectives entirely. Almost all were the result of struggle and compromise, conflict and debate. But all the initiatives discussed here were based on the notion that

> Canadians had shared rights and shared responsibilities and that they deserved some protection from the excesses of the market (p. 55).

The federal government developed two programs to share the costs of social welfare, health and post-secondary education with the provinces: the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) in 1966 to provide funds for social services, and The Established Programs Financing Arrangement (EPF) in 1977 to address health and post-secondary education. Relevant here is that the goals of CAP were to prevent poverty and provide assistance to citizens in need (Armstrong, 1997). Importantly, the federal government had specific regulations in place through CAP that required that social assistance be provided by the provinces without work requirements, thereby providing a modest basic income to citizens in need.

In the 1990s, key changes to the federal administration of funding for social services, health and post-secondary education created an opportunity for a watershed of change to how provinces provided social assistance. In 1996, CAP and the EPF were abolished and replaced with the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST). Through the CHST, the federal government provided block-funding to the provinces for social services, health and post-secondary education, and gave provinces increased discretionary power about how to prioritize spending. Because the monies provided to provinces was given in a block grant for these programs, it put the funding for social services in competition with health and post-secondary education. Not surprisingly, provincial governments tended to prioritize health and post-secondary education over social assistance. The CHST also removed the requirement that social assistance be provided without strings. Consequently, provinces began to enact welfare-to-work policies, fundamentally altering the previous notion that welfare was a rights' based program (Armstrong, 1997). The

Province of Alberta, for instance, began a process of revamping its social assistance system by developing regulations to restrict eligibility and financial support for welfare recipients and mandating welfare recipients into job training programs (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998a; Vosko, 1999). The social assistance program was renamed Supports for Independence (SFI), making it explicit that the purpose of SFI was temporary support which was intended ultimately to lead to self-sufficiency.

While this trend may be viewed as a "passing fancy", there is evidence to suggest that these policy moves are part of a larger shift in how we view citizenship within modern day welfare states. The emergence of the global economy evidenced by the internationalization of capital and the proliferation of trans-national companies, coupled with rising national deficits and declining national growth gave rise to the ideology of neo-liberalism in many industrialized nations in the 1980s, including Canada (Teeple, 2000). The gloomy economic landscape of Canada in the 1980s led to increased unemployment, and subsequent increased usage of social welfare programs. The costs of these programs thus began to escalate (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Pulkingham & Ternowetsky, 1996; Vosko, 1999). In such a climate, governments increasingly blamed welfare recipients for rising public expenditures (Klein & Montgomery, 2001; Peck, 2001a; Shragge, 1997). Critics of the welfare-to-work trend argue, however, that the claims that welfare recipients were responsible for the economic crisis are unfounded, given that social welfare expenditures comprised just six percent of the federal debt (Pulkingham & Ternowetsky, 1996). Rather, they suggest that the welfare-to-work bandwagon has had more to do with the persuasive ideology of neo-liberalism than impending financial calamity (Piven & Cloward 2001).

Rooted in classic 19th century liberalism, neo-liberalism is characterized by its focus on the primacy of the market, individualism, small government and de-regulation (O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999; Teeple, 2000). Central to neo-liberalism is the concept of economic rationalism, which emphasizes deficit reduction, cost-effectiveness and government efficiency, and de-emphasizes increased government services and poverty reduction (Baker & Tippin, 1999). Neo-liberal ideology has dominated the discourse on how to address income security in recent years, and has led to a shift in the conceptualization of citizenship entitlements (Baker and Tippin, 1999; Brodie, 1997). According to this ideology, the strengths or limitations of the market must direct the provision of income assistance, and social benefits are viewed as a privilege rather than as a right. The result is that economic security for marginalized citizens is increasingly contingent upon their attachment to the labour force.

The requirement to be attached to the labour market in order to have any kind of income security is called market citizenship, and suggests a significant departure from a more inclusive notion of citizenship, otherwise known as social citizenship (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Brodie, 1997). Significantly different assumptions underlie these approaches. Where a social citizenship approach argues that there is a basic right of all citizens to a certain standard of living, regardless of market trends, a market citizenship approach operates with the assumption that all social programs must be contextualized within a market economy. While a social citizenship approach asserts that social programs are a right of citizenship which must be provided beyond the scope and limitations of the market, a market citizenship approach limits services to citizens based on contested notions of need and deservedness. This shift has significant implications for those who are not attached to the labour force at all, or whose attachment is precarious at best.

Under the umbrella of market citizenship, paid labour is valued to the extent that there is a "moral obligation to engage in it" (Baker & Tippin, 1999, p. 53). In short, employment is equated with independence and independence is increasingly associated with worthy citizenship (Baker & Tippin, 1999). Consequently, eligibility requirements for welfare are less likely to be viewed as a social right. Rather, welfare is more likely to be viewed as a temporary interim benefit to sustain a person until s/he can obtain self-sufficiency through employment. That social responsibility within the ideology of market citizenship is devalued and de-emphasized indicates a significant shift in focus from community responsibility to individual responsibility. Indeed, Baker and Tippin posit that "longstanding ideas of the collective interest are being supplanted in official political discourse by notions that citizens are individual consumers with no a priori claims on social provision from the state, and that they increasingly should look to private support such as the family, community, and voluntary organizations" (p. 66). Hence, within a discourse of market citizenship, concepts of community, interdependence and social cohesion deteriorate and individualism predominates. Set within this ideological context, this study examined how welfare-to-work initiatives in Alberta have impacted the day-to-day experiences of welfare recipients, showing how these experiences are connected to larger social, political and economic constructs.

This study contributes to a small Canadian literature and a burgeoning American literature that has examined the economic impacts of welfare reform. Overall, this body of research indicates that welfare-to-work initiatives lead to temporary low-paying jobs that seldom include flexibility, autonomy or benefits such as sick time (Cancian & Meyer, 2000; Ellwood, 2000; Elton, Siepper, Azmier & Roach, 1997; Harris, 1996; Long, 2001; Shillington, 1998; Villeneuve, 2000; Vosko, 1999). While little is known about the non-economic impacts of welfare reform on welfare recipients, researchers are beginning to examine how welfare-to-work initiatives impact the health, family-functioning, and childcare arrangements of welfare recipients. For example, research exploring the relationship between health status and employment status suggests that poor health is linked to unemployment. While still in its infancy, new U.S. scholarship on welfare reform suggests that the poor health status of many welfare recipients and their children may impede their ability to comply with mandatory welfare-to-work legislation (Polit, London & Martinez, 2001). If poor health precludes welfare recipients from securing labour-force attachment, how will mandatory welfare-to-work policies impact welfare recipients' access to necessary financial resources in an increasingly neo-liberal society?

Research Problem

The purpose of this research was to contribute to the nascent literature on Canadian welfare reform by examining the day-to-day impacts of welfare-to-work initiatives on families in poverty. My research was set within a larger three-year study, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), to assess the implications of welfare-to-work policies on pre-school children's health and development[1]. There were three major components to the larger project: a review of social and economic policies that relate to the welfare-to-work trend in Canada; statistical analyses of data from the Canadian National

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[1] See Williamson & Salkie (2005) and Williamson, Salkie & Letourneau(2005) for further detail on the findings from this research project.

Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth; and a primary data collection piece, which included developmental assessments of pre-school children from social assistance poor and working poor families, as well as qualitative interviews with families transitioning from welfare to work. My contribution to this project was to conduct the recruitment, data collection, data analysis and publication of the findings for the qualitative component.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized as follows. In chapter two I examine a variety of bodies of literature to show the various interactions among ideology, social policy and empirical research, highlighting the impacts of welfare reform on families in poverty. I weave the theoretical frameworks of human ecological theory and critical feminist theory throughout this review, to search for analytical openings that provide opportunities for further research. Through this discussion, I reveal gaps in current thinking and writing on welfare reform, and show how my study addresses some of these gaps. Chapter three describes the methodology of institutional ethnography as developed by a contemporary Canadian sociologist, Dorothy Smith, situating this approach within the critical science tradition. I then outline the process that I used to locate study participants, collect data, interview participants, and analyze data.

Chapters four through six detail the experiences of 17 welfare recipients in their quest to become productive market citizens. In chapter four, I introduce the participants of this study in their environments as they entered welfare-to-work programs, depicting the daily struggles they faced with income and food insecurity, stigma and social isolation, and their attempts to address these problems. Chapter five shows how welfare-to-work offered welfare recipients an opportunity to leave a life of poverty – what I refer to as *the promise*. In chapter six I juxtapose the promise of welfare-to-work with *the reality*, showing the outcomes of welfare-to-work activities for participants. I discuss what these findings reveal about larger social processes, positing that the trend toward active social policies which attempt to move welfare recipients to self-sufficiency will not be successful because they fail to adequately acknowledge and address obstacles faced by welfare recipients. In chapter seven, the final chapter, I revisit the concept of social citizenship, and propose a vision for a caring society.

Chapter Two
Perspectives in the Literature

The poverty of our century is unlike that of any other. It is not, as poverty was before, the result of natural scarcity, but of a set of priorities imposed upon the rest of the world by the rich. Consequently, the modern poor are not pitied but written off as trash. The twentieth-century consumer economy has produced the first culture for which a beggar is a reminder of nothing. John Berger

While Canadian literature assessing the impact of welfare reform on families living in poverty is somewhat limited to date, there is an extensive and ever-expanding literature assessing the impact of welfare reform on the economic status of welfare recipients, primarily single mothers and their children, in the U.S. Whereas governments are anxious to evaluate the impact of welfare reform on public expenditures, poverty researchers and advocates are interested in assessing the impact of welfare reform on the economic, and more recently, the non-economic lives of welfare recipients. Although there are extensive longitudinal, multi-site studies throughout the U.S. which examine the impact of welfare-to-work initiatives on low-income families, I will argue in this analysis that, on balance, there are two conceptual pieces that are missing in the welfare reform literature, and one empirical piece that needs significantly more research. First, much of the literature assessing the impact of welfare reform is analyzed without examining the influence of larger ideological constructs on the development of welfare-to-work policy, namely neo-liberalism. Here, I will show how neo-liberalism has influenced Canadian welfare policy, moving it further away from a model of social citizenship, where citizens are entitled to benefits by virtue of their citizenship entitlements, and closer to market citizenship, where citizenship rights are contingent upon an individual's attachment to the labour market.

Second, I find that, with the exception of a few important feminist analyses, much of the impact of welfare reform is assessed without a gender lens. This is problematic given the inherently gendered nature of welfare policy development. My challenge here is to contribute toward filling this gap through offering an analysis which both contextualizes welfare-to-work initiatives within the neo-liberal ideological shift, and shows the importance of using a gender analysis when examining the impacts of welfare reform on families in poverty. Furthermore, only recently have researchers begun to look at the non-economic impacts of welfare reform including how welfare-to-work policies impact the well-being of welfare recipients, particularly their health, family-functioning, and childcare arrangements. Yet this knowledge is important to understand the full implications of welfare reform, and to further examine how changing notions of citizenship may be implicitly represented in welfare-to-work initiatives. I will therefore contribute to this literature through examining the non-economic impacts of welfare-to-work.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, I outline the main concepts and assumptions of human ecological theory and feminist theory, showing how they can be used to reveal connections between ideological constructs and individuals' experiences through the medium of social policy. I frame the development of welfare-to-work policies within an influential, if often unseen ideological umbrella, to ask not only how welfare reform impacts welfare recipients, but also to look at how the individual experiences of families reveal how policy is constructed within larger social, political and economic processes. This approach is consistent with an institutional ethnographic methodology, which seeks to explicate the connection between the day-to-day realities of everyday life and the larger social processes in which individual experience occurs (this methodology will be thoroughly reviewed in chapter three). Then, I look at the concepts of neo-liberalism and citizenship, exploring the extent to which neo-liberal ideology has further moved Canada from a model of social citizenship to a model of market citizenship. Further, I show how these conceptualizations are important when evaluating the goals and assumptions of welfare-to-work policies. Finally, I examine the large body of research on welfare-to-work policies to explore what is known about the impacts of welfare-to-work policies on the economic and non-economic realities for welfare recipients as they move from welfare to work. After reviewing the literature, I highlight gaps in current writing about welfare reform, and explain how the research framework used in this study will address some of these gaps.

Clarification of terms

There are a number of terms often used interchangeably in the literature on welfare reform, and that are used interchangeably in this dissertation. These terms are: *welfare recipients*, *welfare recipients with pre-school children, families in poverty, impoverished families, low-income families*, and *low-income single mothers*. There are a number of reasons for the interchangeable use of these terms. First, in the literature contextualizing welfare reform, the research is sometimes looking at families in poverty generally, not necessarily welfare recipients. Therefore, in this case these families are referred to as *families in poverty* or *low-income families*. Second, most of the literature examining welfare reform looks at the poverty of single mothers thus using terms such as *sole mothers in poverty*, *single mothers in poverty*, and so on. In my study, however, most, but not all, participants are women. Therefore, for the purposes of my study, I use the term *families in poverty* or *welfare recipients* rather than *single mothers in poverty*. Third, in my study the participants are current or former welfare recipients with pre-school children who are engaged in mandatory welfare-to-work programs. Although the term *welfare recipients* has a broader application in the Canadian context (welfare recipients may also be individuals without children), I use the term *welfare recipients* here to refer to *welfare recipients with pre-school children* simply because the latter term is cumbersome. Finally, because all families discussed in this analysis have low incomes, they will sometimes be referred to as *families in poverty* or *low-income families.*

The terms *economic* and *non-economic impacts* also require explanation. The term *economic impacts* refers to the effects of welfare reform on earnings, income stability, and income transfers from government sources, as well as job opportunities of welfare recipients. The term *non-economic impacts* refers to the effects that welfare reforms have on the well-being of families, including the emotional and physical health of individual family members, family-functioning, and childcare arrangements.

Human Ecological Perspective

Human ecology theory provides a powerful theoretical construct to frame research about the nature of poverty within Canadian society. Because human ecology theory is designed to study the inter-relationships between humans and their environments (Visvader, 1986), it has the potential to contribute to theorizing about the ways in which broader social, political, and economic contexts impact, mitigate, and perpetuate poverty. Human ecology theory can also reveal how ideological constructs influence the social policy environment and how welfare policy, in turn, impacts individuals.

There are several important assumptions within the human ecological framework that provide a useful foundation for developing an ecology of poverty. First, human ecology theory assumes that context is vital in explaining individual and family development, as well as quality of life. "The well-being of individuals and families cannot be considered apart from the well-being of the whole ecosystem" (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p. 425). In poverty research, human ecology theory can be used to contextualize individual poverty within broader policy and ideological environments.

Second, there is the assumption of reciprocity between humans and their environments. While social, economic, physical and political environments influence individuals, individuals also influence the various contexts in which they live (Steiner, 1995). "The uniqueness of human ecology," according to Sontag and Bubolz (1988), "lies in its focus on viewing humans and their near environments as integrated wholes, mutually influencing each other" (p. 118). The concept of reciprocity is intriguing because it suggests that although there may be a significant power imbalance between individuals and their environments, there is potential to change the power relations – between individuals and oppressive structures – that lead to power imbalances. This assumption thus gives room for notions of individual agency and the ability to transform systems. Thus, in human ecology theory, the individual, while influenced by his or her environments, is not determined by them. Using this assumption enhances understanding of the impact that social policy, contextualized within the larger social, economic, political and ideological environment, has on the experiences of individuals. However, it also leaves room to explore how individual agency has the potential to impact larger political, social and economic structures.

To understand the forces of structure and agency in molding social processes within a human ecological paradigm, Sprey's (2000) metaphor of a river is useful. He explains that rivers are "self-organizing, dynamic, systems; complex, but analyzable" and (Yates, Garfinkel, Walter & Yates, 1987, as cited in Sprey, 2000, p. 22) that a river's "flow is constrained by, but also shapes, its banks" (Sprey, p. 22). Human agency is symbolized by the flow; societal structure is symbolized by the banks. Human agency is constrained by, although simultaneously shapes, societal structure. When human agency is stronger (where the current flows faster and harder because of the force of gravity), it has more ability to shape the structure. When human agency is weakened however (when the pull of gravity is diminished by a flat stretch in the river or a widening of the banks), there is less opportunity to shape the structure (river banks). Structure and agency therefore mutually influence one another, albeit with grades of influence. It should be noted that human ecological theory recognizes the limits of individual agency. Human ecologists, while recognizing human agency, are also cognizant of the reality that environments "pose limitations and constraints as well as possibilities and opportunities" for families in poverty (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p. 426). While recognizing the limited opportunity for many people in poverty to exercise agency, it could be argued that having an opportunity to make known their day-to-day experiences through a research project could enhance opportunities to exercise individual agency.

Third, human ecology theorists assume that certain interactions between individuals and their environments are developed through human-made rules "related to use and allocation of resources, role expectations, and distribution of power" (Bubolz and Sontag, 1993, p. 426). Jenson (1997) emphasizes the fact that social institutions are constructed through political action.

> Neither the creation of institutions nor their modification are unmediated consequences of socio-economic structural tendencies. Limits and constraints obviously exist, but structuration is the result of action. These processes of structuration require detailed attention, precisely because they vary in space and in time. *This means choices exist* (p. 630, emphasis added).

Opportunities exist for system change as institutions are not static, but dynamic. This assumption provides an opportunity to recognize that social policy, which addresses poverty, can be rethought and reworked to better recognize the needs of people in poverty.

A fourth assumption of human ecology theory is that "(k)nowledge can be used to transform oppressive social structures in order to bring about greater justice and freedom" (Bubolz and Sontag, 1993p. 428). Siry (1988) argues that human ecology is a metadiscipline because it "challenges the traditional role and the authority of specialists over certain prescribed domains of knowledge" (as cited in Strauss, 1990, p.13). As a metadiscipline, human ecological theory provides an opportunity for a unique and original perspective to develop. This notion applies well to the conceptualization of poverty. O'Connor (2000) suggests that poverty research must move away from its current focus on the behaviour of people in poverty and look more at structural issues. Furthermore, through the use of a gender lens, new opportunities to see implicit assumptions about gender in policy addressing poverty become clearer. In reframing the issue of poverty, we have the opportunity to reveal new analytical openings that provide opportunities for deconstructing the complexity of large societal structures and their interactions with individuals.

In this study, I use the human ecological perspective to refocus the issue of poverty on structural issues, and to examine the gendered nature of welfare reform. An institutional ethnographic methodological approach is employed to make linkages between the experiences of individuals in poverty and the larger social processes which contribute to organizing these experiences. Thus, the issue of poverty is reframed by looking at how welfare recipients' lives are structured by policy and ideology within Canadian society. Furthermore, this study considers how ideology and policy reveal shifting notions of citizenship.

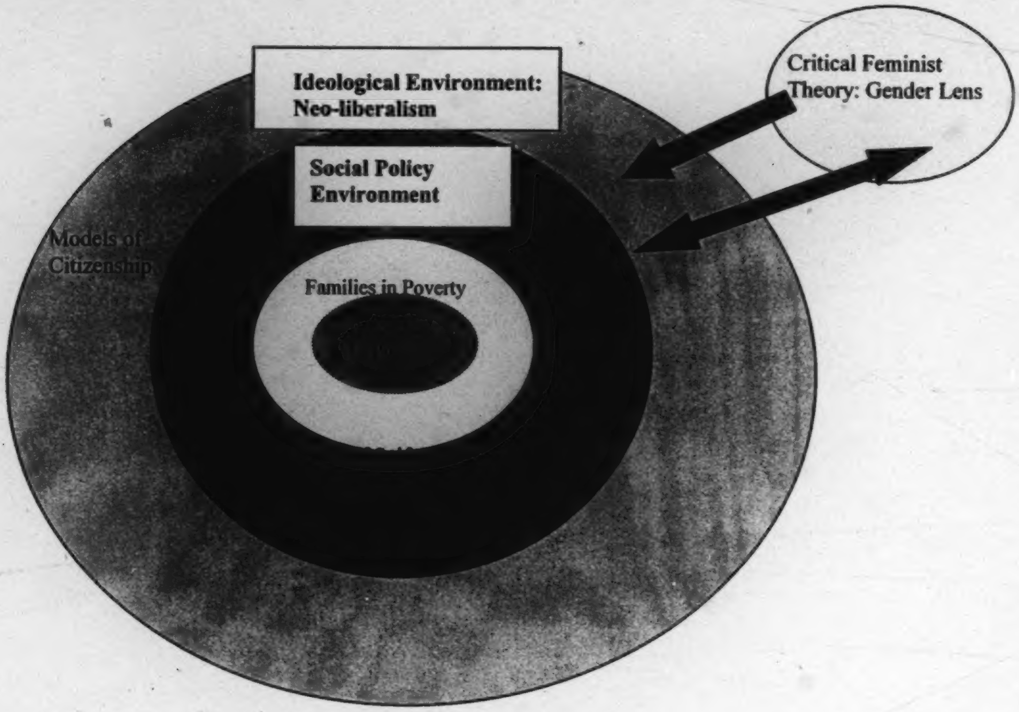
A human ecological model

Introduction

For this study, I have developed a model using a human ecological framework to conceptualize how families' experiences are situated within larger social processes. Human ecology theory, like institutional ethnographic methodology, focuses on the contexts in which individual lives are shaped. Using a human ecological model, then, gives a graphic representation of the ways in which individuals interact with their environments. The human ecological model of nested environments, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) to show how individuals are embedded within their family, community and societal contexts, can be adapted to explore the ways in which individuals and families in poverty interact with their various environments, particularly the social policy environment as nested within the larger ideological environment.

Figure 1 shows how the family is embedded within the social policy environment and the ideological environment of society. Below I outline the various environments within the model, and briefly explain their significance in relation to

Figure 1. Interface Between Individuals In Poverty and Their Environments: A Human Ecological Model


Ideological Environment:
Neo-liberalism
Critical Feminist
Theory: Gender Lens
Social Policy
Environment
Models of
Citizenship
Families in Poverty

families and individuals in poverty. Following this brief description of the model, I engage in an in-depth discussion of relevant literature as related to each environment within the model. Hence, my literature review is organized to mirror the various aspects of the model I have developed here. I start the in-depth discussion with the ideological environment, then move to the social policy environment, and finally review the bulk of the literature which discusses the empirical findings about the impact of welfare-to-work policies on families and individuals in poverty.

Environments

Ideological environment

Incorporated within the external layer of the model is the ideological context for policy development and implementation. The current ideology shaping social policy in Canada is neo-liberalism, which assumes the primacy of the market. The ideological climate of a society has significant impacts on marginalized people including those in poverty, because they tend to be more vulnerable than other groups. How a society conceptualizes citizenship becomes extremely important for these groups. If, for example, a society views people who need extra support from the public purse as valuable citizens who have entitlement to government supports, this particular group of people will have a greater chance at an enhanced quality of life, including a reduction in poverty. In our current society, seniors are an example of a group of persons who have received public support to increase government financial transfers, resulting in significantly reduced rates of poverty in the last 20 years (Beauvais & Jenson, 2001). If on the other hand, a group is viewed as undeserving, implying that somehow this group has not earned its citizenship entitlement, it will be stigmatized and support will be minimal. Single mothers on welfare would be one such group in our society (Baker & Tippin, 1999). Increasingly, full citizenship in liberal welfare states is granted only to those who fit within the acceptable confines of the market economy (Baker & Tippin, 1999). Where seniors might be seen to have made their contributions to society, defined as their *market* contributions, single mothers are often seen as persons who are taking, but not contributing, to the public good, again increasingly defined in market terms.

Social policy environment

The social policy environment is included to consider the ways in which social policy impacts families and individuals in poverty. Welfare-to-work is particularly pertinent here. When people are mandated into employability programs, this will have consequences for their emotional and physical health and well-being, family-functioning and childcare arrangements. Notions of gender equality, dependency and self-sufficiency are included in this layer of the model, because of their critical importance in shaping social policy. How gender equality, dependency and self-sufficiency are defined and understood by policy makers has significant consequences for how welfare recipients will be constituted within neo-liberal society, thus impacting their citizenship status.

Families and individuals in poverty

A discussion of families and individuals in poverty is grouped together here, because their distinction in the context of this study is somewhat artificial. Individuals in poverty are often part of families, and families in poverty are most definitely composed of individuals. The perforated line between the individual and family circles, as indicated in Figure 1, represents the recognition of the interconnection, yet distinction, between individuals and their family environments. Although it is acknowledged that individual representatives of families do not necessarily represent the perspectives and experiences of all family members (Copeland & White, 1991; Eichler, 1997), it is also a necessary limitation of this research that the primary parent of each family was interviewed, and it is therefore his or her perspectives and accounts of the family experiences that are portrayed. Thus, while the focus of this research is on the experiences of families in poverty, these experiences are relayed by one individual in poverty, as a spokesperson for that family. Within the model the recognition of the individual in poverty is thus contextualized within families in poverty. This illustrates that although this research is about families in poverty, it is recognized that families are composed of individuals in poverty who undoubtedly have both similar and different experiences of that poverty.

Interaction between individuals and environments

The two-headed arrow represents the interactive nature of the individual with various environments, as well as the interaction among environments. This model thus recognizes the reciprocity of the interactions between individuals and their environments: while it is clear that environments impact the individual, the individual also has the potential to exercise agency within human-built structures. Individuals in poverty might exercise their agency by joining groups which lobby for change, such as the National Anti-Poverty Organization. They might also exercise their agency through participating in participatory action research projects. As well, individuals might exercise their agency when they resist policies through refusing to comply with particular requirements, such as choosing not to claim extra sources of income such as gifts of money or report an "under the table" job.

The second type of interaction is that between the environments. McKnight (1995) illuminates this process. He argues that it is important to look at how various programs are connected, suggesting that potentially positive programs can have negative impacts through their unknown interactions with other programs. Using an analogy of a forest, he suggests that one tree in itself does not change an eco-system. However, as you get many trees together, the climate can change, creating a completely different environment, a forest, that is difficult to see in its midst.

Likewise, the impacts of one program in itself may have minimal, and/or positive effects, but in combination with many other unconnected programs may create an invisible, yet harmful impact. Theoretically, recognizing the interaction between these programs, and creating policies which consider the interplay between them, can be highly effective.

Gender lens

A gender lens, signifying a feminist analysis, is incorporated in the model to demonstrate that in this conceptualization, policy will be examined to determine its differential impacts based on gender. The inclusion of a gender analysis in this framework is important as gender has tended to be overlooked in social policy analysis (O'Connor, 1996). The use of a gender lens is better understood within the context of critical feminist theory, which is explained below.

Critical feminist theory

Critical theory has its origins in studying oppression from a class-based analysis, whereas feminist theory has its origins in studying oppression from a gender-based analysis. Where critical theory may be understood as a critical analysis of social institutions in order to illuminate the structure of domination and oppression (Fay, 1987), feminist theory may be thought of as "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it" (Gordon, 1979, as cited in Osmond & Thorne, p. 592, 1993). Critical feminist theory is a hybrid of these two theories.

Critical feminist theory, like critical theory, seeks to reveal structural oppression, transform systems, and emancipate oppressed individuals. The main distinguishing feature of critical theory and critical feminist theory is that the latter includes gender as a category of analysis, arguing that the female experience has been overlooked historically (Harding, 1987;Reinharz, 1992). By making visible previously invisible female experiences, critical feminist theorists work to correct "both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991, p. 71).

Critical feminists assume that the social construction of gender must be understood within social, historic and cultural contexts (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). By making the connection between individual experiences and societal contexts, critical feminist theorizing of issues such as poverty or violence emphasizes structural explanations over individualistic explanations of particular phenomena. In this way, a feminist critical theoretical approach dovetails nicely with a human ecological approach. It offers an opportunity to look at the connection between the individual experiences of marginalized women and structural oppression (Bloom, 1998). Specifically, critical feminist theory serves as an important theoretical lens for researching the impact of welfare-to-work policies on the lives of families in poverty, with its focus on the importance of personal experience and the emancipation of particular groups of people from parts of society that are oppressive, "especially ideologies, that maintain the status quo by restricting or limiting different groups' access to the means of gaining knowledge" (Nielsen, 1990, p. 9).

Feminist theorists have expanded their categories of analysis due to criticism for not adequately considering other areas of discrimination such as race, class, disability, and sexual orientation (see, for example, hooks, 1989). Critical feminist theorists now recognize that gender is not the only basis for discrimination, but rather one of various sites of oppression (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Assumptions from feminist theory are thus used to apply to broader understandings of social inequality. Bloom (1998) emphasizes this point: "Feminist women of color in particular note that feminist theory from U.S.-born, white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied Christian women tends to rely on gender as the sole category of critical analysis because sexism is the form of domination most relevant to them" (p. 140, author's emphasis). Bloom's point is well taken. As a privileged, educated person studying poverty, I must stop to reflect on my experiences of gender-based oppression and recognize that marginalization will look significantly different to women in poverty than it does to me. I must seek to understand oppression from their viewpoints, not my own.

In summary, the relational, comprehensive, and holistic nature of human ecology theory and critical feminist theory, while creating theoretical complexity and messiness, provide the potential for a more complete picture of how individuals and their environments interrelate, mutually influencing one another. Furthermore, because human ecology theory and critical feminist theory are both applied theories, they facilitate the development of recommendations from research that can lead to social and political change.

In the next section I review relevant literature related to the various environments within the human ecological model I have introduced above. I start with the outer rim of the model, the ideological environment, and work inwards, concluding with the bulk of the literature that examines the consequences of welfare reform for low-income families with pre-school children.

The Ideological Environment

Neo-liberalism

The key assumptions underlying the language, tone and policy development of welfare-to-work initiatives in Canada reflect the ideology of neo-liberalism. In fact, Piven and Cloward (2001) suggest that "*the propelling force* behind the workfare campaign arises not from some quasi-mystical postindustrial economic imperative but from neo-liberal politics" (p. xi, emphasis added). In other words, the logic behind welfare-to-work initiatives has less to do with a proven economic crisis, and more to do with persuasive ideology. The importance of neo-liberal assumptions, then, must be emphasized in understanding welfare-to-work initiatives. There are three main assumptions of neo-liberalism used to justify welfare-to-work initiatives. First, the private sector, following the rules of the market, uses resources more efficiently and cost-effectively than the public sector. Second, the provision of universal social benefits does not decrease poverty or unemployment. Rather, it increases the comfort-level of receiving state benefits for those in need, further perpetuating state dependency. Lastly, social benefits are not a right, but are a privilege which entail particular responsibilities to the state (Baker and Tippin, 1999; Brodie, 1997). The language of economic rationalism resonates with neo-liberal ideology, and has been used to justify welfare-to-work trends. Economic rationalism emphasizes deficit reduction, cost-effectiveness and government efficiency, and de-emphasizes government services and poverty reduction (Baker and Tippin, 1999). A neo-liberal agenda thus works to convince citizens that the main role of the state is fiscal responsibility, not the provision of a social safety net. As McDaniel (2002) states, "Attempts by civil society or citizens to assert social rights or the public interest are recodified as against progress" (p. 131).

It is important to note that a body of comparative literature exists which analyzes policy outcomes in different countries. Scholars in this area challenge the notion of the "globalization thesis" which suggests that the increase in international capital has influenced the retrenchment of welfare states. Instead, they argue that the influence of movements such as neo-liberalism is but one factor informing the direction a nation takes in how it approaches social policy, as evidenced by divergent choices made by a variety of nation states (Benoit, 2000; Sainsbury, 1996; Swank, 2002). According to this literature, policy directions are not inevitable; rather, alternatives exist.

Comparative scholars point out that European countries generally, and Scandinavian countries more specifically, have recognized that employment in itself is not adequate to eliminate poverty. The focus in European countries is to look not only at labour-force attachment, but at the quality of jobs attained (Jenson, 2003). Although labour-market attachment in these countries is still a goal, it is recognized that other supports are also needed to reduce poverty and enhance the well-being of marginalized individuals and families. In cross-national comparative literature, Sweden is often upheld as a model for recognizing and addressing gender inequality, in part through state benefits and in part through the provision of public sector jobs and adequate childcare in order to support women's labour market attachment (Benoit, 2000; Sainsbury, 1996).

Given that this study is not comparative, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to review this cross-national literature in detail. However, I mention this body of literature to remind us that the development of social policies within countries is affected not only by larger social forces such as globalization and ideologies like neo-liberalism, but also by within country factors such as historical influences and the mobilization of collective action (Benoit, 2000; Sainsbury, 1996; Swank, 2002). Nonetheless, I argue here that neo-liberalism has had a significant impact on the direction of policy trends in Canada, and has subsequently influenced how citizenship is understood.

Models of citizenship

While there are various ways to conceptualize citizenship, the overarching perspectives can be divided into two broad-based views: social citizenship and market citizenship. With the influence of neo-liberalism, Canada, like other liberal welfare states, is moving increasingly from a model of social citizenship to a model of market citizenship (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Brodie, 1997). The concept of social citizenship is intricately connected to understandings of the welfare state. Originating with T.H. Marshall (1965), the term social citizenship encapsulates the idea that the role of the welfare state, broadly conceptualized, is to provide a safeguard from the market economy, offering a certain level of commitment to its citizens to buffer potential negative impacts of a market economy (Marshall, 1994). In welfare states, however differently they may be constructed, the notion that the state has a responsibility to ensure at least a minimal level of well-being for its citizens is understood. In its perfect form, social citizenship "represents the highest development of the principle of welfarism or social reformism" (Teeple, 2000, p. 46). Advocates of social citizenship thus uphold the notion of public responsibility for the well-being of citizens, regardless of market trends (Marshall, 1994).

In the context of Canada, social citizenship emerged as a model of organization in the postwar era. Commencing with the Marsh Report (1942) on social security, the Canadian welfare state was born. Marsh's vision of society entailed federal support, funding and administration for programs including social insurance, social assistance, family allowance, health insurance and old age security (Burman, 1996). Although not instituted in a comprehensive, unified form as Marsh envisioned, the welfare state in Canada expanded through the next several decades to include these programs, albeit in a rather piecemeal and residual fashion.

Unlike social citizenship, market citizenship hinges citizenship rights to labour-force attachment. In other words, it equates paid employment with independence and worthy citizenship (Baker & Tippin, 1999). According to this perspective, social programs can only be offered within the confines of the market. Boyd and McDaniel (1995) state that the market approach to social policy is significant for women as it has "diminished the traditional role of social policy as redistributive of resources to reduce inequalities to one of laissez-faire" (p. 30). Like neo-liberalism, then, market citizenship is closely aligned with the private sector and individual rights and responsibilities. Market citizenship resembles a conventional notion of citizenship based on the assumption of the autonomous individual who is detached from any particular interests. In other words, a conventional citizen is "male, white, heterosexual and economically privileged" (Marshall, 1994, p. 135). This understanding of citizenship is problematic from a feminist perspective. Unlike the autonomous individual, women are likely to be constructed as takers of state services and relationally connected to someone else as a wife, mother, ex-wife, widow, grandmother and so on. Thus, employed men are seen as the prototype of the individual; women, in contrast, "are related to individuals" (Marshall, 1994, p. 135).

Within the market citizenship model, the assumption that work will bring economic benefits is problematic from a feminist perspective. According to this assumption, if notions of citizenship are closely tied to paid work, it follows that the more one works for pay, the more citizenship entitlements he or she will receive. Using a gender lens shows that this reasoning is faulty when applied to women. Many women do not work full-time due to their disproportionate amount of caring responsibilities in comparison to men. Additionally, women generally have significantly lower incomes than men, even if working full-time (Chaykowski & Powell, 1999). Hence, the failure to factor in gender analysis has alarming consequences for women, especially those who are poor, in a market economy. Furthermore, Baker and Tippin (1999) clearly highlight the consequences for policy development as well: "Trying to make women into economic actors without addressing their family roles and their relationship to the market and state lays the groundwork for policy failure" (p. 263). In other words, until governments recognize the interplay between work and family, and the additional barriers that low-income workers face, policies designed to move individuals into the workforce will be ineffective. Welfare policies, in short, need to recognize inequalities based on gender and class if they are to be successful.

It must be noted that the shift from social and market citizenship in Canada is not a neat and tidy demarcation, nor is it conceptually uncontested. Teeple (2002) contends that although social citizenship was achieved in many western welfare states in the postwar era, the achievement was "partial and conditional" (p. 47). Canada's history of social development is best characterized as messy, complex, piecemeal and at times contradictory (Siltanen, 2002). In critiquing the argument that Canada has shifted from social to market citizenship, Siltanen (2002) acknowledges that a shift has taken place, but she posits that it is essentially a "within-paradigm intensification – from mean and lean, to meaner and leaner" (p. 397).

Scholars point out that the application of social citizenship ideals did not apply to groups of people marginal or outside the labour force (Teeple, 2000), showing that like market citizenship, the centrality of labour-force attachment for citizenship was assumed then as now. This had particularly significant consequences for women. Feminist critiques of the golden age of the welfare state show that assumptions underpinning social citizenship were based on the experiences of the common male worker, not the experience of women largely relegated to the private sphere (Pateman, 1988). In other words, Marshall's conceptualization of social citizenship incorporated class, but overlooked gender even while unstated gendered assumptions underpinned the conceptualization of social programs where the "workplace and the home presumed a stable working class, a nuclear family, and a dependent wife and children support by a male breadwinner" (Bakker, 1996, p. 17). It is therefore important not to mythologize the postwar era as an ideal time, particularly for women. As Bakker (1996) states: "a state-centered perspective that harkens back to the Keynesian era should …not go unproblematized" (p. 17).

Just as the implementation of the notion of social citizenship in the postwar era was not complete, neither is the development of market citizenship. Even with the predominance of market citizenship in current society, social security still exists, albeit in watered-down forms. We do not live in a society devoid of any social programs. Importantly, despite the deterioration of various social programs, there is still evidence of caring and collectivity in current society. Citizens' resistance to the retrenchment of the universal provision of health, education, and old age security serve as examples to suggest that not everyone has embraced the ethos of market citizenship. Hence, even when things change, they stay the same. Strands of continuity and discontinuity are evident.

Having pointed out the untidy nature of this distinction between market and social citizenship, I will continue to use these conceptualizations for, despite their limitations, they prove useful as instructive tools for a gendered analysis of current trends in welfare policy developments. White (2003) points out two fundamental changes have occurred in the past decade, providing compelling evidence that a significant shift has taken place, despite the blurring of the lines. First, where work was once seen as a right, it is now an obligation. Second, where the market was once seen as place that citizens sometimes needed *protection from* due to its volatility, it is now seen as the place in which citizens *gain protection* from income insecurity. As White (2003) states: "Indeed, the labour market is no longer seen as a *producer* of risks, but rather as the *solution* to the health and social risks associated with poverty and exclusion" (p. 71, emphasis in original). Hence, although labour-force attachment has always been important, the risks and vulnerabilities inherent in the market are no longer acknowledged in policies mandating work for welfare recipients. At different points throughout this study, I reflect on these conceptualizations about social and market citizenship in light of the findings of this study, arguing that this shift in emphasis has particularly detrimental implications for impoverished women with children. The shift from the social citizenship model to the market citizenship model becomes more evident in the analysis of welfare-to-work legislation where the goals, assumptions, discrepancies and contradictions of various conceptualizations of welfare are played out.

The Social Policy Environment

Goals and assumptions of welfare-to-work: The Canadian context

Reflective of current ideological understandings, the Canadian welfare state has undergone significant modifications in the last decade. Most generally, the policy orientation has shifted from a "passive" social protection state to an "active" policy orientation (Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003). As such, many provincial social assistance programs have received a substantial overhaul with the intent of increasing the labour-force attachment of welfare recipients. Provincial policy changes have been accompanied by federal policy initiatives, specifically The National Child Benefit, to facilitate further labour-force attachment and reduce child poverty. Key to welfare reform is the concept of self-sufficiency, the notion that citizens should receive income from market income, not state benefits.

The explicit goals of welfare reform in Canada are clear: to reduce government expenditures and to move welfare recipients into work (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998a; OECD, 1999). These goals will be achieved, according to this approach, through promoting self-sufficiency, encouraging family responsibility, reducing dependency on the state, and tightening eligibility requirements to make it more difficult to receive social assistance benefits (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Gorlick & Brethour, 1998a; OECD, 1999; Peck, 2001a; Shragge, 1997).

> [The] key to dealing with social insecurity can be summed up in a single phrase: helping people get and keep jobs…Key to this is to overcome Canada's "skills' deficit"– to offer the best-educated, best-trained workforce in the world, and that must be our common goal in the coming years (HRDC, 1994, Cited in Peck, 2001a, p. 213).

The path to self-sufficiency then, according to Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), is employment (HRDC, 2000b; OECD, 1999).

In addition to tightening eligibility for social assistance benefits, many provinces have made social assistance benefits contingent upon participation in employability programs. These programs are designed to enhance human capital and basic job skills, in order to facilitate the labour-force attachment of welfare recipients deemed employable. A variety of employability programs exist: while some are part-time and focus on life-skills and personal development, including conflict management and budgeting, others are full-time and focus on job skills such as resume writing, interview skills, job search, and on-the-job training (Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE), 2002-2003; Gorlick & Brethour, 1998a).

On top of provincially run employability programs, the federal government has developed a joint initiative with provincial and territorial governments called the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS). The NCBS has two clear goals: to reduce the depth of child poverty and to encourage labour-force attachment through reducing barriers to the welfare wall (HRDC, 2000a; National Child Benefit, 2004). Importantly, receipt of the NCBS is not dependent on employment status. If a family's income is below a certain level (which varies according to number of children and region), the family receives the NCBS. Thus, whether a family is receiving social assistance or employment income, it will still receive the NCBS. However, provinces have the option of reducing social assistance benefits to reflect the NCBS income of welfare recipients, and the majority of the provinces have done this. Therefore, while families receiving welfare are no better off financially with the NCBS, low-income employed families have an income supplement (Beauvais & Jenson, 2001). As stated by the federal government: "by making more income and other benefits and services available outside the welfare system for families with children, many low-income families will find it easier to support their children while in the labour force" (Government of Canada, 2000a). Thus, the NCBS is intended to increase low-income families' motivation to move into the labour market, and decrease the barriers to doing so.

Although the explicit goals of welfare reform seem relatively straightforward, to reduce government expenditures and to increase the self-sufficiency of welfare recipients, upon further analysis it becomes increasingly clear that the goals are, in fact, riddled with unexamined, misunderstood, and empirically unfounded assumptions about what it means to promote *gender equality*, to decrease *dependency* and to increase *self-sufficiency*. In the next section I examine these concepts more closely to show how underlying assumptions further move welfare policy from a framework of social citizenship to market citizenship.

Gender equality

Perhaps one of the most contentious words in policy development is the term "equality." Contemporary policy discourse tends to understand equality as equality of opportunity. Although the notion of gender equality is upheld, this understanding of equality is based on the presumption of sameness in the economic and caring aspects of the family. In other words, men and women are assumed to contribute equally to the family purse and the childcare and household responsibilities within the family. The natural progression of this assumption is that if the husband or wife is absent from the family, the state has no responsibility in replacing either role as their roles are seen as equal and mutually exclusive. Importantly, the logical outcome of this assumption is that a single parent is equally as capable as a two-parent family in providing economic and caring needs for the family. Clearly, this is not the case. Significant inequalities exist in the economic opportunities of women and men where women are significantly disadvantaged (McDaniel, 2002). Furthermore, women engage in more caring work than men, especially in relation to the care of dependent children and/or aging parents.

Today, most feminists, while acknowledging the importance of 'equality as sameness' in particular instances, argue that to treat people equally does not always mean treating them the same (Eichler, 1997). Rather, the meaning of equality is achieved when people are treated differently based on their different starting points. Equality discourse in this sense recognizes that people experience different structural barriers based on race, class, gender, age, and sexual orientation, and accommodates those differences. In the context of welfare-to-work initiatives, a feminist discourse on equality highlights the reality that women experience the labour force differently than men due to the pink ghetto of female labour and the greater childcare and other caring responsibilities that women engage in. That this is not factored into welfare-to-work policy initiatives will have a substantially negative impact on lone mothers.

Dependency

Within neo-liberal society, welfare recipients are viewed as dependent individuals. Dependency, in most situations, is not considered to be a desirable status, but rather one that is indicative of shortcomings which should be addressed. Even in situations where dependency is accepted, such as the dependence of a child, the goal is to move the individual -- in this case, the child -- into a state of independence. The conceptualization of dependency as negative, and welfare recipients as dependent, is critical in the ideological play to blame impoverished individuals for the failings of the market economy. Through individualizing dependency -- making it the responsibility of the individual in poverty -- society is able to abdicate responsibility for families in poverty.

Various authors have discussed the multitude of paradoxes in relation to notions of dependency (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; O'Connor, 1996; Robertson, 1998). In an historical analysis on the concept of dependency, Fraser and Gordon (1994) argue that the social construction of dependency ties in significantly to the development of understandings about acceptable and unacceptable dependency. Fraser and Gordon point out that while dependency was once understood within a social context where few people had independence and power due to a lack of legal, political, social and economic rights, dependency in industrial and postindustrial times was and is understood within a different context. Within modern day Western societies, citizens are perceived to have equal access to legal, political, social and economic rights. Therefore, most individuals perceived as dependent within this society are considered flawed. Fraser and Gordon (1994) summarize this sentiment:

> With capitalist economic dependency already abolished by definition, and with legal and political dependency now abolished by law, postindustrial society appears to some conservatives and liberals to have eliminated every social-structural basis of dependency. Whatever dependency, remains, therefore, can be interpreted as the fault of individuals (p. 325).

The meaning of dependency has thus become individualized.

In debating welfare reform, fascinating, contradictory notions of dependency arise. The most striking contradiction is that while some welfare states encourage middle-class women to be "stay at home" mothers and dependent on their husbands for financial sustenance, they simultaneously require low-income lone mothers to work for wages and pay someone else to care for their children. Thus, while "stay at home" mothers with male breadwinners are saluted for their outstanding "family values", poor women who wish to raise their children full-time are declared lazy and psychologically dependent on the state. Another contradiction in the rhetoric on dependency is that male breadwinners are considered independent despite their considerable reliance on women to care for them, their children, their homes and other needy persons in their lives (Baker & Tippin, 1999). The analysis of dependency and independence can be reworked, then, to argue that it is actually male breadwinners who are dependent on women for care-giving responsibilities (Cass, 1994). Or, as Shragge (1997) has done, we can ask if the rich are becoming too dependent on their wealth (Shragge, 1997). Clearly, there are various ways to reconceptualize understandings of dependency. However, within the welfare reform environment, policies clearly indicate that financial dependency upon the state is negative, and financial independence is positive. That the Alberta social assistance program was called "Supports for Independence"[2] underscores the assumption in Alberta welfare policy that the receipt of state benefits is undesirable and should therefore be temporary.

Self-sufficiency

Intricately tied to the notion of dependency is the concept of self-sufficiency. Within current welfare reform initiatives in Canada, self-sufficiency is a clear policy goal. If a person is dependent, the logical solution is to lead him or her along the path to self-sufficiency. For example, an early Alberta policy document stated that the new social assistance program, Supports for Independence (SFI) would: "provide support which promotes independence – *financial* independence for those who are able to work" (Alberta Family and Social Services [AFSS], 1990, p. 5). Surprisingly, although self-sufficiency is a central concept in welfare restructuring, it is not defined in policy documents. Rather, it is assumed that the meaning of self-sufficiency is known. To be self-sufficient, according to The Funk & Wagnall's Canadian College Dictionary (1989), is to be "able to support or maintain oneself without aid or cooperation from others" (Avis, p. 1220). This definition suggests that self-sufficiency is only attained when an individual is completely self-reliant in all ways. It has undertones of understandings about the "self-made man" – one who achieves success without any support or assistance from others. Yet, the self-made man is anything but self-made. Any successful individual achieves success within a complex matrix of support and assistance from others. This definition thus seems to fall short as it denies the inter-connectedness of individuals within families and communities.

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[2] The program name was changed to Alberta Works in January, 2004.

One American author, Long (2001), has attempted to define self-sufficiency within the context of welfare reform. He formulates the definition of self-sufficiency as: "having income that is above the poverty threshold *and* not derived from any form of public assistance" (Long, 2001, p. 391, author's emphasis). According to Long's definition, then, self-sufficiency can be measured according to two components: adequate income *and* complete financial independence from the state. The corollary, then, is that self-sufficiency will be equivalent to employment (unless one is independently wealthy). However, this assumption is incorrect in several ways. First, if self-sufficiency is equated with employment, and it is assumed that welfare recipients are not self-sufficient, it also assumes that they do not work. Welfare recipients, however, have always engaged in paid employment (O'Connor, 2000). Additionally, paid work, even when full-time, does not guarantee an income above the poverty line, thus resulting in the increasingly familiar phenomenon of "working poor." The notion that the absence of welfare receipt is equivalent to self-sufficiency has been proved false by much research evidence (Elton et al., 1997; Harris, 1996; Shragge, 1997). Long (2001) too concedes that leaving welfare is no longer a "reasonable proxy for substantially increased family self-reliance" (p. 390).

The second part of Long's definition of self-sufficiency – that self-sufficiency entails the absence of financial support from public funds – is clearly problematic. All Canadians, like citizens of other liberal welfare states, receive public funds. So, according to Long's definition of self-sufficiency, it follows that no Canadians are self-sufficient due to the provision of universal healthcare and education. Taking that argument once step further, we could make a compelling case that no-one in any liberal welfare state is self-sufficient, because middle-class and wealthy citizens benefit from many public funds, most notably tax concessions. Poignantly, O'Connor (2000) reformulates assumptions behind welfare reform:

> The problem, ignored in the ongoing push to minimize public assistance and to get poor people into "work first", is not with the propensity of welfare to coddle dependency and bad behavior. It is with a political economy that has tolerated such high concentrations of wealth (to reverse the usual formulation) amidst steadily declining standards of living for the working class and much of the middle class (p. 552).

O'Connor's reconceptualization of the welfare problem underscores the point that there are various ways to understand notions of welfare dependency and self-sufficiency. The academic dialogue about these concepts, among others, reveals the enormity of the task of deconstructing unchallenged "known truths" to gain greater understanding into the complexities of welfare reform. In the current welfare reform climate, many "truths" are based on neo-liberal understandings, and become clearer when looking at the deconstruction of the goals of welfare reform.

One more point should be made about the goals of welfare reform. Strikingly, the goal of reducing poverty is only mentioned in the context of reducing *child* poverty. That there is not even a pretence of reducing poverty in welfare-to-work rhetoric reveals the lack of concern for adults in poverty. As long as people are not collecting welfare, the government need not concern itself with the health and well-being of its citizens. Market citizenship's primacy over social citizenship here, as in other examples, seems clear.

In summary, the social policy environment in Canada, specifically as it relates to welfare reform, reflects a shift to neo-liberal understandings and a market-based approach to policy interventions. In this context, dependency upon the state is understood as a shortcoming of individuals rather than a structural problem of society. Consequently, self-sufficiency has become the Holy Grail of welfare reform, and hence the key goal of welfare restructuring.

Individuals and Families Within Their Environments: The Effects of Welfare-to-Work Initiatives on Families in Poverty

Introduction

While it is clear that welfare rates in Canada have been substantially reduced since the introduction of welfare-to-work initiatives -- 75% in Alberta between 1993 and 2002 (Alberta Human Resources & Employment, 2002) -- the consequences of these new policies on low-income families remain unclear. Although some Canadian research has been done on the economic consequences of welfare-to-work on families in poverty, little is known about the non-economic consequences. Yet, this information is integral in order to understand how welfare reform may impact the health, family-functioning, and childcare arrangements of families in poverty. New U.S. scholarship on the non-economic impacts of welfare reform suggests that the poor health status of many welfare recipients and their children may impede their ability to comply with mandatory welfare-to-work legislation (McBride Murray, Brody, Brown, Wisenbaker, Cutrona, & Simons, 2002; Romero, Chavkin, Wise, Smith & Wood, 2002; Polit et al., 2001; Smith, Romero, Wood, Wampler, Chavkin & Wise, 2002). If poor health precludes welfare recipients from secure labour force attachment, how will mandatory welfare-to-work policies impact welfare recipients' access to necessary resources in an increasingly neo-liberal society? Clearly, further research on the health barriers of Canadian welfare-to-work participants is needed.

The review of the empirical literature is organized as follows. First, I outline the main contours of the literature on welfare reform. Then, I review the extensive body of literature which examines the economic impacts of welfare reform on welfare recipients with pre-school children. Following this discussion, I review the newer and thinner literature on the non-economic impacts of welfare restructuring. Finally, I identify gaps in the literature, and show how my study will contribute to Canadian welfare reform literature.

In this review, I draw upon Canadian and U.S. literature, since more policy impact studies, to date, have been done in the United States. Admittedly, caution must be used when drawing conclusions from American literature to apply to the Canadian context. However, many of the current policy trends in welfare reform, both internationally and in Canada, originate in the U. S. Thus, it is appropriate to examine findings about the implications of welfare reform there, in order to learn some valuable insights about potential impacts of welfare reform within Canada.

Economic consequences of welfare-to-work policies on low-income families

There are two predominant assumptions about the economic impacts of welfare reform in current policy frameworks: first, most welfare recipients can obtain and maintain employment; and second, employment will *eventually* lead to self-sufficiency (Corcoran, Danzier, Kalil & Seefeldt, 2000). The analysis of these assumptions has led to two opposing stories in the literature about welfare reform. One story states that welfare reform is achieving its goals– reducing caseloads and getting employable welfare recipients off assistance and into the labour market. Proponents of this view argue that welfare reform will improve the economic situation of welfare recipients by encouraging work and self-sufficiency (Alberta Human Resources & Employment, 2002; Boosenkool, 1997; Schafer, Emes & Clemens, 2001). The explicit assumption behind this perspective is that any job is a good job which will eventually lead to a better, higher paying job. Others tell a different narrative. Proponents of this perspective argue that while welfare reform reduces welfare caseloads, it will further impoverish those already in poverty (Cooper Institute, 1999; McFarland & Mullaly, 1996; Shillington, 1998; Vosko, 1999). From this point of view, those who obtain dead-end jobs will likely remain in dead-end jobs. Thus, while former welfare recipients may be finding employment, the nature of many of the jobs – part-time, low-paying and dead-end – does little to increase their income. Critics of welfare reform raise questions about the long-term non-economic impacts of welfare reform on welfare recipients. In summary, both perspectives acknowledge that welfare-to-work participants usually obtain low-paying jobs. However, supporters of welfare-to-work initiatives believe that a poor job is a stepping stone to a good job, whereas those who question welfare-to-work believe that a poor job will lead to further poverty and a sense of hopelessness.

To evaluate the validity of either of the perspectives indicated above, I will review a significant body of research that looks at the patterns of welfare use and employment behaviour of current and former welfare recipients, particularly single mothers, as well as the growing body of literature that attempts to analyze the connection between policy and employment outcomes. I will argue that, on balance, this literature suggests that although welfare recipients are obtaining jobs, they are not achieving self-sufficiency as they are not able to survive solely on market income for more than short periods of time, and continue to live in poverty upon leaving welfare.

A fundamental assumption about welfare use and employment patterns of welfare recipients underlies welfare reform initiatives: that most welfare recipients are chronic users of welfare and consequently lack experience in the labour market. This assumption is challenged, however, by empirical findings. Stewart and Dooley (1999), for example, used administrative data from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services to look at pre-reform social assistance use among single mothers in Ontario between 1990 and1994. This study found that approximately 30% of welfare spells end within five months, 50% ended within 20 months, and 30% were still ongoing at 55 months. Significantly, 60% of former welfare recipients were still off welfare after four years.

These findings are supported by other studies done after welfare reforms were implemented. For example, following significant welfare reforms in Alberta in

1993, two surveys were conducted to examine welfare recipients' movement in and out of welfare, as well as the types of jobs obtained by welfare recipients. Both studies spanned the time period between 1993 and 1996, looking at the welfare and work experiences of welfare recipients with or without children. Using telephone survey data, as well as a small sample of data from former welfare recipients without telephones, Elton et al. (1997) found that over half of welfare recipients surveyed (53.3%) reported leaving welfare for work. Similarly, using telephone survey data of current and former welfare recipients, Shillington (1998) examined the patterns of movement in and out of welfare, as well as the types of jobs obtained by welfare recipients. Shillington (1998) found that most respondents reported one welfare spell between 1993 and 1996, and that only 9% of the sample reported social assistance use for the duration of the time studied. The notion that most welfare recipients are long-term users is thus refuted by this evidence.

Literature that looks at employment behaviour indicates that, while there tends to be a volatile work history in the lives of welfare recipients, most have worked and are able to obtain employment (Cancian & Meyer, 2000; Corcoran et al., 2000; Elton et al., 1997; Harris, 1993, 1996; Shillington, 1998; Stewart & Dooley, 1999). Shillington (1998) found, for example, that 28% of the respondents reported working in 1993, 44% in 1994, 57% in 1995, and 66% in 1996. The significant increase in employment between 1993 and 1996 in this study is explained in part by two factors. First, recipients may have remembered recent jobs obtained more accurately than jobs in previous years. Second, Alberta began experiencing a significant economic recovery between 1993 and 1996, which may account for a larger number of welfare recipients' ability to obtain employment. Another Canadian study showed that in 1994, prior to the majority of welfare reforms, 77% of low-income families with pre-school children secured income from the labour market and for 55% of these, employment was the sole source of income. Only 23% of low-income families with pre-school children were solely dependent on social assistance (Williamson, Salkie, Fast, Dennis, Letourneau, 2001).

American research suggests similar findings. Longitudinal studies from the U.S., using the National Longitudinal Survey for Youth (NLSY) and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), suggest that approximately half of mothers on welfare worked at some point while receiving welfare. Furthermore, finding employment was the reason for about half to two-thirds of welfare exits (Cancian & Meyer, 2000; Harris, 1993). The important point about this body of research, relevant to this discussion, is that the assumption that welfare recipients have not worked is false. Therefore, when governments discuss moving welfare recipients into the labour force, they are actually discussing the movement of people into the labour force who already have a history of labour-force involvement.

Although welfare recipients do obtain jobs, Canadian research suggests that these jobs are most often temporary and low-paying (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998a; Shillington, 1998; Vosko, 1999), and do not move former welfare recipients out of poverty (Frenette & Picot, 2003). Moreover, most jobs that former welfare recipients obtain do not include flexibility, autonomy or benefits such as paid sick time (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998a; Shillington, 1998; Vosko, 1999). Furthermore, when employment related costs such as childcare, transportation and suitable workplace clothing are incurred, the disposable income of the employees may be less than that obtained from welfare payments (Elton et al. 1997).

Recent Canadian studies shed light on this issue. Using tax data, Frenette and Picot (2003) examined the economic well-being of those leaving welfare in

Canada during the 1990s. They used the Longitudinal Administrative Databank (LAD) which consists of a 20% sub-sample of income tax files. Out of this database, Frenette and Picot (2003) selected persons who left welfare between 1992 and 1997, and were still off welfare two years later. Their sample consisted of 9% of all those who were on welfare at some point in the same time period. Their findings show that income increased overall for welfare recipients who left the welfare rolls. Importantly, however, one-third of those leaving welfare had a substantial decrease in income, and almost 60% were still living in poverty two years after leaving welfare. In another Canadian study, Janz (2004) examined data from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics to track employees with low-paying jobs, finding that less than half of employees with low-paying jobs in 1996 had moved out of them by 2001. Her findings suggest that the notion of "moving up the ladder" is unlikely for many low-income workers.

National longitudinal data from the U.S. also provides evidence to suggest that although most welfare recipients do work at some point, their ability to maintain stable employment is unlikely. In a landmark study on what happens to women after leaving welfare, Harris (1996) examined national longitudinal data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) for the years 1983 to 1988. She found that 25-40% of women who leave welfare for work return to welfare within one year and close to 70% return to welfare within five years (Harris, 1996). In reviewing a variety of earlier welfare-to-work demonstration projects, Corcoran et al. (2000) concluded that most recipients who obtained employment lost their jobs within one year. Analyzing NLSY data to follow women for five years upon exiting welfare, Cancian and Meyer (2000) found that over time, median wages and hours worked increased and that earnings generally improved. However even in the fifth year, only one in four women consistently worked full-time. Periods of intermittent work, part-time work, and joblessness were quite common.

In addition to the ongoing instability of labour-market conditions for low-income workers, continued poverty while working was cited as a key reason for returning to welfare. Research from the U.S. indicates that single mothers who leave welfare do not achieve enough earnings to constitute a living wage (Cancian & Meyer, 2000; Corcoran et al., 2000; Harris, 1996; Litt, Gaddis, Fletcher & Winter, 2000; Pavetti & Acs; 1997; Rose, 2000). In short, although the large majority of mothers on welfare wished to be employed over being on welfare, they could not afford it (Edin & Lein, 1996). Harris (1996) states that "welfare reform and public attention has focused primarily on *getting women off welfare* without a long-range vision for *keeping women off welfare*" (p. 408). If welfare recipients are expected to sustain self-sufficiency, the opportunity to earn a living wage must clearly be available.

Several Canadian authors have raised concerns about the consequences of welfare recipients moving into the labour force, not only for former welfare recipients, but for all low-income workers. Some scholars argue that employability programs are replacing the jobs of low-income workers (Burman, 1996; McFarland & Mullaly,1996; Shragge, 1997). For instance, Burman argues that the Alberta Community Employment (ACE) program, designed to provide welfare recipients with job training through full-time employment for a six-month period, is replacing jobs of other low-income workers. Others argue that programs such as ACE are increasingly used by non-profit organizations to fill jobs that have been eliminated due to government cutbacks (Murphy, 1997). Using an economic model to predict the effects of welfare reform on the earnings of low-income workers, Klein and

Montgomery (2001) found that while welfare reform is not taking jobs away from low-income workers, it is providing surplus labour for low-skill jobs. The result of this surplus is the stagnation of wage rates for low-income workers within a flourishing economy where wages should be increasing. These examples suggest that there may be reason for concern regarding the potential consequences of welfare reform on the low-income labour pool. If low-income workers are competing for jobs, either resulting in job loss for some, or stagnant wages for others, the chances of maintaining labour-force attachment on the one hand, and a living wage on the other, are greatly reduced.

The success of welfare reform in increasing the labour-force participation of welfare recipients, while acknowledged, has also been the subject of some debate (Ellwood, 2000; Long, 2001). There is mixed evidence about how much of the increase in employment can be attributed to successful welfare reform, and how much can be attributed to a strong economy. Some empirical evidence suggests that much of the caseload reduction in the U.S. has been caused by a strong economy as opposed to welfare reform (Corcoran et al., 2000; Ziliak, Figlio, Davis & Connolly, 1997). Some analysts, using various economic models to assess the impact of the economy on caseload reduction between 1994 and 1996, have found that a reduction in unemployment rates accounted for 10 to 33% of caseload reductions (Corcoran et al., 2000). Although there is no available evidence to corroborate these findings in the Canadian context, it has been pointed out by several authors that welfare reform has coincided with a strong Canadian economy (Klein & Montgomery, 2001; Shillington, 1998). When evaluating the success of welfare reform, we must ask if welfare recipients found jobs as a result of welfare reform, or as a result of a strong economy. In other words, would welfare recipients be as successful in finding employment in the context of an economic downturn?

The self-sufficiency project

Presently, two major research programs exist in North America to examine the potential implications of welfare-to-work programs -- the Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) in Canada and the Manpower Research Demonstration Project (MRDC) in the U.S (Bloom & Michalopoulos, 2001; Michalopoulos, Tattrie, et al, 2002). Below, I examine the Self-Sufficiency Project in-depth, as it is, to date, the most comprehensive policy impact study assessing the economic and, to a lesser extent, the non-economic implications of welfare reform on Canadian families. Although the SSP was conducted prior to the welfare-to-work policies in existence during the course of my study, its findings enhance understanding about the implications of welfare-to-work.

Using a random assignment methodology, The SSP was designed to assess whether or not financial incentives would increase labour-force participation among single parents who had been on social assistance for at least one year. Participants in the program group were offered a financial incentive as long as they maintained full-time employment (30 hours a week or more). The SSP offered income supplements for up to three years to those who maintained full-time employment. The researchers followed participants for a period of six years to evaluate the longer-term impacts of the supplement offer. Those randomly assigned at the beginning of the study were followed from 1992 to 1997, and the last participants randomly assigned were followed from 1995 to 1999.

Evaluators of the SSP indicate that this project significantly increased the incentive to work by increasing employment, increasing income and decreasing poverty (Michalopoulos, Card, Gennetian, Harknett, & Robins, 2000). For example, by the end of the third year of the program, 28.8% of the program group worked full-time, as compared to 19% of the control group (Michalopoulos, Card et al., 2000). In other words, the average difference between employment in the program group and the control group in the third year was 9.8%. As well, at the end of the third year of the project, the SSP reduced the percentage of families below the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs (LICOs) by 9.4% (Michalopoulos, Card et al., 2000). Furthermore, the evaluators indicate that the SSP was cost-effective as the costs saved in welfare benefits and increased income taxes (paid by the SSP program participants) balanced out the costs of the project (Michalopoulos & Hoy, 2001). The SSP has been saluted as a successful experiment (Greenwood; 2000; Long, 2001; Villeneuve, 2000), although some Canadian authors have questioned the conclusions offered about the success of the program (Kornberger, Fast & Williamson, 2001).

An important question for the project was this: will people who benefited from the earnings supplement provided by the Self-Sufficiency Project maintain their increased income upon losing the supplement? Data from follow-up research suggests that the answer to this question is no. By the middle of the fourth year of the study (after the three year subsidies had been relinquished), only 20% of both the control and program groups earned incomes above the LICOs with an average of $1,250 of after-tax income (Michalopoulos, Tattrie, et al. 2002). That is, once the subsidies ended, 80% of both the program and control groups were living with income below the LICOs.

The longer term effects of income supplements did not appear to alter labour force participation either. For example, by the middle of the fifth year of the study, 28% of the program group participants were working compared to 27% of the control group, with average earnings for both groups of approximately $500 per month. Interestingly, by the final stages of the project, "the net gain in full-time employment among control group members exceeded that of program group members" (Michalopoulos, Tattrie, et al. 2002, p. 176). Furthermore, by the middle of the sixth year, the use of income assistance programs was the same in both the program and control groups.

A few points regarding the results of the SSP are worth emphasizing here. First, for welfare recipients able to seek employment, the subsidy program augments income so that low-income people can afford to work in the current labour market. While an assumption of the SSP is that subsidies offer people motivation to work, this assumption is questionable. The fact that the control group actually exceeded the program group in terms of full-time employment in the sixth year of the study suggests that low-income people do not need a supplement in order to seek employment; rather, the labour market needs to provide jobs that provide a living wage.

Second, only one-third of welfare participants who were randomly selected for the program group of the SSP accepted the offer, despite the clear income incentive. Reasons given by welfare recipients for not taking the offer of a financial incentive were as follows: they could not find a full-time job (cited by 43%); they had family or personal responsibilities that prevented them from working (15%); and they had health problems or disabilities that precluded them from working (14%) (Lin, Robins, Card, Harknett & Lui-Gurr, 1998).

The reasons why welfare recipients refused the SSP alternative, despite the obvious income advantage, may reveal important insights about the structural and individual barriers faced by welfare recipients mandated into welfare-to-work programs such as market barriers, family responsibilities and health problems. Yet the evaluators of SSP do not adequately explore the reasons given by two-thirds of the people who were offered financial incentives but did not accept them. *Looking at the two-thirds who did not accept the supplement, however, might tell us more about the causes of, and solutions to, poverty than the current findings of the SSP.* It is important to study not only those who successfully moved into the labour force, but also those who did not. Furthermore, while income may have increased significantly for one-third of the participants who were eligible for SSP supplements in the program group, the outcomes for the two-thirds who did not accept the supplement are unknown. Rather than touting The Self-Sufficiency Project as an unequivocal success, it might be more appropriate to summarize its findings as follows:

> [E]arnings supplements appear to work in terms of encouraging more employment, at least in the short term, for at least some people…Moving from welfare to work is only the first step, and for many it is the easiest step. The more difficult policy challenge is to find ways of supporting people in their effort to remain employed and helping them progress to better jobs with better pay" (Greenwood, 2000, p. 164-165).

Although income supplements may enable people to work, there are important barriers to work that require more study. These include: an examination of a labour market that does not support low-income people; barriers to childcare; and potential health problems of welfare recipients and/or their children which may impede labour-force attachment.

In summary, current research on the economic impacts of welfare reform indicates that although many welfare recipients obtain work, their employment does not necessarily lead to sustained self-sufficiency due to the temporary, part-time, low-paying and unstable nature of their employment options. Furthermore, whether or not job attainment is due to welfare reform or economic growth is unclear. The potential impact of an economic downturn on the employment of low-income workers is open to speculation. The critical point in this literature is that *employment itself is not a guarantee of economic success.*

Although an implicit assumption of welfare reform is that paid employment is equivalent to self-sufficiency, this is clearly not the case for low-income workers. Market forces are subject to change, and those in low-skill, part-time jobs in the labour force may find themselves highly vulnerable. Dependency on the market may not be preferable to dependency on state benefits as the market within postindustrialization is unstable at best (Baker & Tippin 1999). Literature about the economic consequences of welfare reform suggests that if policies intended to move people from welfare to work are to be successful, policymakers must examine labour-market conditions which preclude low-income workers from earning a living wage.

Non-economic consequences of welfare-to-work policies on low-income families

The term *non-economic* refers to how policy impacts the general well-being of families in poverty. Included in family well-being, for the purposes of this study, are the following: the emotional and physical health of individual family members; the day-to-day functioning of the family, including parent-child interactions; and childcare arrangements. Because welfare reform in Canada has not been guided by goals relating to the non-economic experiences of welfare recipients and their families, it could be argued that studying the non-economic impacts of welfare-to-work initiatives is irrelevant. However, there are three important reasons for understanding the non-economic impacts of welfare reform on families in poverty. First, human ecological theorists are concerned about how environments impact individuals (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Presumably, the impact of the social policy environment on families in poverty would reach beyond economic impacts and also affect these families in non-economic ways. And, because human ecological theorists are concerned with human betterment (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993), they would want to understand the full implications of these impacts on families in poverty. Thus, when applying the human ecology model, it is important to look at both the economic and non-economic impacts of welfare-to-work initiatives on families in poverty.

A second reason for looking at the non-economic impacts of reform, from a pragmatic perspective, is that if we want policy to be effective we must understand the implications it has for those affected by it. To overlook the non-economic impacts of policy could lead to policy failure, as welfare recipients will not be able to move successfully to work if this move adversely impacts their well-being, including their health, family-functioning and childcare arrangements. Finally, the non-economic impacts of policy changes are important from a citizenship perspective. If policy changes have positive non-economic implications for welfare recipients, we could argue that their citizenship entitlements are augmented, and the public good is therefore increased through the enhancement of well-being for some of the most marginalized families in society. However, if policy changes have negative implications for welfare recipients' well-being, we must ask how these policies might compromise their citizenship entitlements, and thus compromise the public good through creating a society of increased inequality and marginalization of some of its most vulnerable people.

To study the non-economic impacts of policy, however, is a complex task. The literature relevant to the non-economic impacts of welfare reform is somewhat messy because the research problem must be approached from different angles in order to understand how welfare reform affects individuals. To examine this area of study, researchers have taken two main approaches. First, researchers recognize that to understand the impact of welfare reform on welfare recipients, it is first critical to understand the *pre-existing* factors which contribute to an individual's need for welfare benefits. While human capital factors such as level of education, work experience, and number of children in the family have been thoroughly examined, little consideration has been given to other factors such as the well-being of parents and their children in low-income families. Recently, however, researchers have begun to look at the pre-existing health status and family-functioning of welfare recipients mandated to work. To date, most of this research focuses on the link between health and employment status, and some important discoveries are being made.

Second, researchers have begun to consider the *impacts* of mandatory welfare-to-work legislation on the well-being of welfare recipients. This research suggests that, in addition to adequate earnings, access to healthcare, childcare and transportation are the most significant factors influencing welfare-to-work participants' transition (Hagen & Davis, 1994; Litt et al., 2000; Miranne, 1998; Oliker, 1995; Seccombe, Battle Walters & James, 1999). If these issues are addressed, participants are likely to view moving from welfare to work as positive for their overall well-being and family-functioning (Seccombe et al., 1999).

In the following section I first review the research on the factors linked to employment status and welfare receipt. Then, I examine the thin body of literature that begins to assess the non-economic impacts of welfare-to-work initiatives on welfare recipients. Although this area of research is only beginning to develop, some of the initial insights gleaned by scholars demonstrate the need for further work in this area.

Factors impacting employment status

The majority of research examining factors that influence the employment of welfare recipients has looked at human capital characteristics. Findings from this research indicate that welfare recipients generally have fewer years of education and work experience than low-income employed persons (Bane & Ellwood, 1994; Danziger, Kalil & Anderson, 2000; Elton, Siepper, Azmier & Roach, 1997; Harris, 1996; Stewart & Dooley, 1999). Longer welfare spells are associated with single mothers who are younger, have fewer years of education, and more children (Stewart & Dooley, 1999). Importantly, the assumption that human capital barriers are the main reason for lack of employment among welfare recipients has been an important factor in Canadian policy initiatives to promote job training and educational programs for welfare recipients (Shragge, 1997). Although these programs could theoretically be useful for welfare recipients as they transition to work, other potential factors that may influence employment have been overlooked, particularly health. Recently, however, researchers have begun to examine the relationship between health and source of income. These relationships are explored below.

Health, employment status and welfare receipt

Examining the relationship between health and employment status, researchers have found a significant correlation between the two. Most generally, those who are employed are healthier than those who are not employed (Jackson, 2000; McBride Murray, Brody, Brown, Wisenbaker, Cutrona & Simons, 2002; Polit, London & Martinez, 2001; Seccombe et al., 1999; Williamson & Fast, 1998; Williamson & Salkie, 2005). Specifically, recent findings suggest that the non-employment of low-income mothers is correlated with poorer physical health, higher anxiety and distress, and less perceived control than their employed counter-parts (Jackson, 2000; McBride Murray et al., 2002; Polit et al., 2001; Romero, Chavkin, Wise, Smith & Wood, 2002). Furthermore, the employment of low-income single mothers is associated with fewer symptoms of depression (Jackson, 2000; McBride Murray et al., 2002; Romero, 2002). Compared with employed women, significantly more women who were not currently working reported that they had difficulty finding work because of their health limitations (36% vs 64%) (Romero et al., 2002).

Given the positive relationship between health and the employment status of low-income persons, it is not surprising that studies that have looked at the relationship between health and welfare receipt consistently find that those receiving welfare are less healthy than the general population (Acs & Loprest; 1998; Polit et al., 2001; Romero et al., 2002; Sweeney, 2000; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2004), as well as less healthy than their working poor counterparts (Williamson & Fast, 1998; Williamson & Salkie, 2005; Williamson, Salkie & Letourneau, 2005). In reviewing state and national studies in the U.S., Sweeney concluded that between 20 and 50% of welfare recipients reported health problems which they indicated precluded them from working. Examining the health problems of low-income mothers with chronically ill children, Romero et al. (2002) found a significant difference between mothers without a history of social assistance and those with experience on social assistance. Mothers who had never been on social assistance reported better physical and mental health, as well as less experience with domestic violence or substance use. Significantly, Polit et al. (2001) found that the greater the health problems, the more likely that welfare recipients were cut-off welfare for "noncompliance", meaning that the welfare recipients failed to meet the requirements which would secure their welfare benefits. This research suggests that more work is needed in order to understand the reasons underlying seemingly noncompliant behaviour.

Overall, these findings lead to a critical question pertaining to welfare reform. Does employment enhance health status, or does positive health status enable employment? The answer to this question has significant implications for welfare reform. If employment leads to better health status, then policies that move people into employment may have some merit. However, if better health status enables employment (implying that poor health status poses challenges to employment), the push to move welfare recipients into employment is highly problematic both from a practical perspective and an ethical perspective. Practically, welfare reform will not be effective if welfare recipients are too unhealthy to work. Furthermore, the ethics of making benefits contingent upon labour force attachment if poor health precludes an individual from working are questionable.

Because most of the studies exploring the relationship between health and employment used cross-sectional, correlational research designs rather than longitudinal approaches, we cannot yet draw clear conclusions about the direction of the relationship between health and employment. Qualitative research designs might help tease out the nuances of the linkages between health, employment status and welfare receipt. However, few qualitative studies have been done to date. Available qualitative in-depth interview data gives evidence to suggest that although health status impacts the employment status of low-income women, employment status also impacts health. Participants in one study using qualitative methods reported poor health as a significant barrier to employment (Polit et al., 2001), whereas participants in another qualitative study indicated that employment improved their mental health status if adequate earnings, childcare, healthcare and transportation provisions were in place (Seccombe et al, 1999). Thus, it seems that the relationship between health and employment is complex. As my study uses in-depth interview data and a quasi-longitudinal approach, it is able to illuminate further the intricacies of the relationship between employment and health.

When looking at the nature of the health problems experienced by welfare recipients, researchers have found that while both physical and mental health problems are prevalent, mental health problems are more significant. Findings from various U.S. national studies suggest that between 22% and 40% of welfare recipients have serious mental health problems including major depression, agoraphobia, panic attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder and generalized anxiety disorders (Jayakody & Stauffer, 2000; Sweeney, 2000). A variety of mental health problems is clearly evident in welfare populations. Furthermore, comorbidity is evident for many of the disorders. Kessler et al. (1994) found that 79% of persons who had ever had one mental health disorder also had one or more other diagnosable mental health disorders.

The prevalence of depressive symptoms among welfare recipients is particularly significant. In their analysis of data from the 1994/95 and 1998/99 cycles of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Williamson and Salkie (2005) found that parents of pre-school children on social assistance had significantly higher rates of depressive symptoms than working poor parents with pre-school children. Examining the prevalence of depressive symptoms among female single parents who were new social assistance applicants, Brown et al. (1997) found that 45% of the respondents had either depression or dysthymia (combination of anxiety and depression) as measured by the Kessler UM-CIDI scales for these disorders. Similarly, Lennon, Blome and English (2002), in their comprehensive review of American studies which used the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) to determine psychiatric diagnoses, found that 20% of welfare recipients had major depression, and close to half had high levels of depressive symptoms. From a policy perspective, it is particularly noteworthy that those with both major depression and dysthymia -- 22% of Brown et al.'s (1997) sample -- had longer welfare spells and consumed 46% of the social assistance budget for single-parent families (Brown et al., 1997). As pointed out by Brown et al. (2002): "Given the nature of depression and particularly double depression [major depression and dysthymia], income maintenance and employment retraining strategies in the absence of proactive health care may be of little value for approximately 45% of sole support parents receiving general welfare assistance" (p. 320). In other words, the research on the health status of welfare recipients suggests that if policy makers do not address health problems generally, and depressive symptoms specifically, there is little hope of successfully moving welfare recipients into the labour market.

Positing that depression may be co-morbid with chronic stressors such as living on a low-income, financial hardship and instability, poor physical health and domestic violence, Lennon et al. (2002) indicate that interventions for depression must go beyond clinical intervention to include recognition of, and response to, the challenges of daily life for welfare recipients:

> It is possible that depressed women are unable to obtain jobs or other sources of support and become dependent on welfare; it is also possible that the stigma and financial hardship associated with receiving welfare are depressing. Alternatively, the association between welfare and depression may reflect the causal impact of another factor, such as poverty, deprivation, or childhood sexual abuse, factors that precede both welfare receipt and depression. (p. 28).

Lennon et al. highlight an important point that is often missed when exploring the relationships between employment status and health, or welfare receipt and health. That is, how much does the difficulty of living in poverty -- including income insecurity, food insecurity, and stigma among others -- contribute to the health status of low-income people? Although the relationships between employment status and health, and welfare receipt and health are established, these relationships have often been examined without a larger contextual understanding of the environment of poverty. Using a human ecological model, this study contributes to this understanding through contextualizing the health experiences of families in poverty within broader social, political and economic environments.

In summary, although research has examined how employment status and welfare receipt are linked to health status, many questions remain regarding the direction of the relationships. Furthermore, surprisingly little attention has been given to these relationships in welfare policy development. This research suggests, however, that if policy makers wish to successfully move welfare recipients into the labour market, they will have to consider carefully the health status of welfare-to-work participants.

Child health, parental employment status and welfare receipt

Recent research has also found a link between parental employment status and chronic illnesses in children. Findings suggest that the disproportionate number of chronic health problems experienced by children of low-income families (Lipman, Offord, & Boyle, 1996; Ross, Scott & Kelly, 1996) is correlated with parental employment status and welfare receipt. Compared with employed low-income women, significantly more women who were not currently working reported that they had difficulty finding work due to their children's health (Heymann & Earle, 1999; Romero et al., 2002). Looking at the association between welfare receipt, parental employment and childhood asthma, Smith, Hatcher and Wertheimer (2002) found that children's asthma is associated with welfare receipt regardless of family structure, especially if the children are pre-schoolers. Of single-parent welfare recipients, 44% had asthmatic children under the age of five. Furthermore, 80% of single parents in poverty with asthmatic children were employed less than full-time, this number increasing to 90% if parents were welfare recipients (Smith, Hatcher and Wertheimer, 2002). High rates of child healthcare use have also been found to be a significant predictor of unemployment. Compared to employed parents, current or former welfare recipients were more likely to use the healthcare system for their children's illness, and were more likely to report that their children's activities were limited due to their illnesses (Smith, Romero, Wood, Wampler, Chavkin & Wise, 2002).

In summary, chronic illnesses such as asthma and psychiatric impairments are disproportionately higher among children in low-income families generally, and welfare recipients' families specifically. Furthermore, welfare recipients report that poor child health is a significant barrier to employment. Given that low-income people are less likely to hold jobs that offer flexible schedules and sick leave (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998a), the additional time and flexibility required to care for sick children may not be feasible. Children's health status may thus impact parents' ability to procure and maintain full-time work.

The literature reviewed above suggests a significant relationship between health, employment, and welfare receipt for people in poverty. More research is needed in this area, however, to obtain more clarity on the direction of the relationship between and among these variables. Furthermore, to date, little data are available to determine the consequences of welfare reform on the well-being of families. To glean these data, studies will have to be conducted which allow for causal conclusions to be made.

In the next section, I explore a thin body of research which examines the relationship between post-welfare employment and health, family-functioning, and childcare. Although these findings do not indicate conclusions about the impacts of welfare reform on the non-economic lives of impoverished families, they do point to questions which are helpful in setting the context for a study to examine these effects.

Post-welfare employment and health

Given that employment is positively correlated with health, it may seem reasonable to assume that moving welfare recipients into the labour market will improve their health. Existing research, however, shows inconclusive findings about the impact of employment on various health variables including maternal stress, anxiety and depression for low-income workers. Whereas some research suggests that single mothers report increased stress and anxiety after leaving welfare (McMullin, Davies & Cassidy, 2002; Secommbe et al., 1999), other research indicates that the employment of African American single parent mothers is linked to fewer symptoms of depression (Jackson, 2000). Generally, welfare-to-work studies show that participation in welfare-to-work programs does not influence the health of mothers and families, although some programs that provided income supplements reduced maternal depressive symptoms (Morris, Huston, Duncan, Crosby & Bos, 2001; Morris & Michalopoulos, 2003).

There is also evidence that families who leave welfare experience food and income insecurity (Leibovitz & Baseman, 2001). It is reasonable to hypothesize that ongoing income and food insecurity play a significant role in increased stress and anxiety. An adequate income, however, could mitigate the increased stress and anxiety experienced among welfare recipients who have begun working. An adequate income might also have a positive impact on depression levels. If food and income insecurity were eliminated, how would this impact the health of employed low-income workers and their families?

Recent findings also suggest that employment may negatively impact the ability of low-income workers to address health problems, thereby exacerbating them (Earle & Heymann, 2002). There are two possible explanations for this. First, because low-income people tend to be less healthy than the general population, their likelihood of requiring more time off for sick days for self or children's health and doctor's appointments is increased. Yet, because of the nature of their jobs, it is unlikely that low-income workers will be given sick time to address health needs. Taking time off for doctor's appointments may therefore jeopardize their employment, as well as include a loss of income they cannot afford (Earle & Heyman, 2002).

The second reason for not addressing health problems when working has to do with the nature of healthcare accessibility. It must be noted that Earle and Heymann's (2002) study, like most of the research examining the impact of welfare reform on the health of former welfare recipients, has been done in the U.S. Therefore, there are limitations to how much we can apply the findings to Canada, given particular policy differences between the countries. The ability to obtain healthcare upon leaving welfare for work would be one such area. Unlike the U.S., Canada provides universal healthcare coverage for physician services and hospital care. This is significantly different than the U.S., where studies have shown that many "welfare leavers" lack health insurance (Mann, Hudman, Salganicoff & Folsom, 2002; Romero et al. 2002). Although U.S. research shows that the failure to address health problems is associated with the employment of low-income workers (Earle & Heymann, 2002), these findings may be quite different within the Canadian context due to the universal provision of basic healthcare benefits.

Having raised the distinction between Canada and the U.S. in the provision of healthcare, it is interesting to note that in one Canadian study examining the relationships among poverty status, health behaviours, and health, low-income workers were more likely than welfare recipients to not see a physician for fear that a prescribed medication would be recommended (Williamson & Fast, 1998). Part of the explanation for this finding is that Canadian universal healthcare benefits do not include coverage for medications and dental work. Full healthcare – including dental work and medications – has been provided to children in many Canadian provinces since 1998 through the National Child Benefit (Government of Canada, 2000a). However, it was not until October, 2002 that the Alberta government began providing additional health benefits for low-income parents making the transition from welfare to work (Government of Alberta, 2002b). Still, the differences in healthcare provision in Canada and the U.S. are significant. Given the universal healthcare coverage offered to Canadians, health considerations for employed, low-income parents may be less significant in Canada than in the U.S.

In summary, the thin body of research on post-welfare employment points to the need for more in-depth study about the relationship between employment and health. Rather than asking the question "is employment good or bad for welfare recipients' health?" three other questions may be more important. First, more research is needed to understand how the disproportionate number of health problems in welfare recipients may impede their ability to sustain employment. Second, more study is needed to understand how the types of employment obtained by low-income workers may impact the health of former welfare recipients mandated into work. Recognizing that not all jobs are good jobs, we must consider further how the quality of jobs obtained by low-income workers – including the level of pay and quality of work conditions – may be significant in considering the relationship between employment and health. In their comprehensive literature review, Polanyi, Tompa and Foley (2003) show that those who experience employment insecurity and precarious work arrangements (temporary and contract work) experience greater levels of stress and are less healthy than other employees. Other research has shown a relationship between low control at work and poor health (Bosma, Marmot, Hemingway, Nicholson Brunner & Stansfeld, 1997). Finally, the impact of income insecurity on well-being requires more attention in examining the potential impacts of welfare reform. Living on a low and unstable income creates continued stress and anxiety, as well as ongoing stigma (Wallerstein, 1992). These factors may be more important in understanding the impact of welfare-to-work on health than the rather simplistic focus on whether or not employment positively impacts health. In this study, I am able to tease out some of the intricacies of the relationship between employment and health to contribute to a greater understanding of how post-welfare employment may impact low-income families.

Family-functioning and parent-child interactions

It has been hypothesized that welfare reform may impact family-functioning, including parent-child interactions, through its impact on employment status and income security. Consequently, researchers have looked at family-functioning, specifically parent-child interactions, from two main approaches. One stream of research has considered the impact of maternal employment on parent-child interactions (Harvey, 1999; Parcel & Meneghan, 1997), given that welfare-to-work initiatives necessitate many mothers to find employment. Mixed findings suggest both benefits and drawbacks from maternal employment on children, but most of these studies have been done with married, middle-class white families. Some research links positive parent-child interactions to jobs with high autonomy (Parcel & Menaghan, 1997). However, low-income workers are unlikely to hold these types of jobs. Studies done on low-income families are also inconclusive. Research suggests that maternal employment has negative implications for parent-child interactions because maternal employment reduces the amount of time mothers spend with their children (Seccombe et al.,1999). However, other research suggests that employment is linked to reduced parental stress, which may lead to more positive parent-child interactions (Jackson, 2000).

A second focus of research on family-functioning examines the impact of income insecurity on parent-child interactions. This research is relevant in the context of welfare reform because the transition from welfare to work is likely to lead to unstable work that will likely have a negative impact on income security (Leibovitz & Baseman, 2001). Research has found that parents with low, unstable incomes experience increased emotional stress and perceive themselves as less-skilled parents than parents with higher, more stable incomes (Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang, & Glassman, 2000; McLoyd, 1990; Taylor, Roberts & Jacobson, 1997). Financial insecurity is linked indirectly to lower nurturing through maternal psychological functioning such that low-income mothers report fewer parent-child interactions than mothers with higher incomes (McLoyd, 1990; Taylor et al., 1997). Furthermore, anxiety, produced in part by income insecurity, is linked to less parental supervision of children and reduced inductive reasoning with children (McBride Murray et al., 2002).

At first glance, the assumption that employment will enhance a parent's self esteem, and consequently improve family relationships, may seem reasonable. However, the application of this assumption to low-income populations suggests that it may need to be rethought. It was noted earlier that the types of jobs that welfare recipients obtain do not usually include factors that make the employment experience positive. Therefore, the notion that employment will lead to greater maternal psychological functioning, which subsequently will lead to greater parent-child interactions must be moderated by the reality that not all jobs are good jobs. The focus on the impact of employment status on parent-child interactions may be missing the mark. In fact, recent research suggests that level of income is more important than source of income in impacting the health and development of pre-school children in poverty (Williamson et al., 2005). More research is needed to assess the importance of level of income for parent-child relations relative to other factors such as maternal employment and health.

Childcare

In examining the non-economic implications of moving welfare recipients with pre-school children into employment, childcare becomes a critical issue. Parents have children, and if they are required to work, they have to find care for their children. Research suggests that childcare costs and availability impact the labour force participation of all women, regardless of socio-economic status (Chaykowski & Powell, 1999; White, 2001). Childcare issues become particularly critical for low-income families, especially welfare-to-work participants, as many parents in this transition have low-paying jobs with irregular hours. Issues of accessibility and affordability are thus paramount for this particular group of childcare seekers. Not surprisingly, accessible, affordable, and quality childcare is critical in determining whether or not a parent will be able to sustain employment after welfare (Edin, 1994; Edin & Lein, 1996; Elton et al., 1997; Harris, 1996; Meyers, 1997; Seccombe et al.,1999). Harris (1996) found that childcare responsibilities were significant in explaining a single mother's return to welfare after a stint of employment. The lack of access to affordable childcare was the primary barrier to maintaining employment for these women. Similarly, Edin and Lein (1996) found that although 85% of the mothers in their study wished to be employed rather than remain on welfare, they could not afford it, partly due to childcare costs. Single mothers on welfare favoured welfare reform if adequate supports were given for childcare (Seccombe et al., 1999). Recognizing that people leaving welfare are most likely to obtain low-paying jobs, researchers recommend comprehensive childcare subsidies to remove the childcare barrier for welfare-to-work participants. Some American authors have posited that welfare dependency among single mothers would decrease significantly with subsidies for childcare costs (Connelly,1990; Kimmel, 1995).

While childcare subsidies are important, they alone do not solve childcare challenges. In Canada, the cost of childcare for low-income families seems to be less significant than in the U.S. due to greater availability of daycare subsidies for low-income families. Currently, subsidies are available in Alberta to a maximum of $475.00 per month per child (Government of Alberta, 2002a). However, even with full subsidies available, childcare is still reported as a barrier to employment. In addition to cost barriers, inflexible childcare arrangements seem significant in determining a mother's reason for not obtaining employment, or going back on welfare after working (Cook, 2000; Edin, 1994; McMullin et al., 2002). Examining why low-income families did not often utilize program-based childcare or childcare subsidies, Lowe and Weisner (2004) found that childcare centres without flexible hours prevented low-income families from accessing their services. Flexible childcare arrangements become paramount in maintaining employment because low-skill jobs are more likely to involve evening and night hours, as well as rotating schedules (Meyers, 1997). Thus, daycare centres that accommodate parents who work irregular shifts would potentially be more successful in meeting the needs of low-income workers.

A lack of affordable and flexible childcare leads to a variety of childcare arrangements which may be unstable, unregulated and poor in quality (Elton, Siepper, Azmier, & Roach, 1997). Findings from the Self Sufficiency Project, for example, indicate that the instability of childcare arrangements for pre-school children increased significantly for the program group (Michalopoulos et al., 2002). In other words, parents who were working 30 hours or more per week had difficulty finding stable childcare for their pre-school aged children. Henly and Lyons (2000) found that low-income parents desired childcare that was affordable, convenient and safe, and they most likely found informal childcare arrangements that met the first two criteria, and sometimes the third. However, informal childcare is not available to everyone, and may be poor in quality. Unstable childcare arrangements are thus significant in determining a mother's reason for going back on welfare (Edin, 1994; Harris, 1996). Clearly, policy which requires the labour force participation of low-income parents must look carefully at the cost, flexibility and quality of childcare programs.

Recently, researchers have begun to recognize the interface between health and childcare, finding that a child's health status may lead to childcare challenges. Given that low-income people have a disproportionate number of health problems, it is not surprising that low-income workers may experience greater challenges in making childcare arrangements for children with health problems. Romero et al. (2002) found that, for low-income women who tried to work in the last three years, lack of childcare was cited as a challenge to finding employment almost twice as often than for women who were currently or previously employed. Upon further examination, it was found that numerous welfare recipients could not find childcare due to the health needs of their children. Thus, the health status of children very much impacts the affordability, accessibility and quality of childcare. Given that low-income people have children with a disproportionate number of health concerns, it should not be surprising that suitable childcare might be difficult to obtain for low-income children. Yet, the connection between child health and childcare availability has seldom been made. Issues such as childcare, while acknowledged as a need in welfare-to-work policy development, are often underemphasized and inadequately addressed, while human capital deficits of low-income parents are continually emphasized.

In summary, little research has been done to examine the non-economic impacts of welfare reform on impoverished families. Research to date has primarily focused on understanding the relationships among health, employment, and welfare receipt, suggesting significant relationships between these factors. Nascent research on the effects of welfare reform on low-income families indicates that welfare-to-work may have impacts on health, family-functioning, and childcare, but more research is needed in this area to establish how welfare-to-work initiatives impact the day-to-day experiences of low-income families.

Summary of literature review

While the goal of governments to move welfare recipients into the labour force may seem straightforward, further analysis of the many assumptions underlying these goals suggest that welfare reform is complicated, and may be based more on ideology than empirical knowledge. Furthermore, a close examination of available findings regarding the impacts of welfare reform suggests that welfare-to-work initiatives may not be as effective as governments claim. In addition, this analysis points to the need for a refocus of poverty research to the structural causes of poverty and barriers to employment. The limitations of continuing to focus on the human capital barriers of welfare recipients without examining the structural causes of poverty are evident.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive to question the advantages of paid employment over state benefits, an analysis of welfare-to-work programs to date suggests that many families leaving welfare for work cannot earn a living wage in the present market economy. Stated succinctly, jobs in the low-wage, low-skill sector of the present market economy do not provide enough money to live on and may have negative non-economic implications for low-income families, which are, as yet, largely unexamined and not well understood. Further research into the non-economic impacts of welfare reform is needed to understand the full implications of welfare reform on the well-being of families in poverty.

Gaps in the Literature

Using the human ecological model to demonstrate the interactions between ideological and policy environments and families and individuals in poverty, I have identified several gaps in the research and thinking about welfare reform to date. First, I have suggested that welfare reform has been examined in a vacuum. A variety of social policies, including welfare-to-work policies, have been significantly influenced by neo-liberal assumptions about gender neutrality and the primacy of the market in decision-making. Attention to these underlying assumptions offers an opportunity to critique them and their relevance to welfare policy development. Yet most of the literature evaluating the impacts and effectiveness of welfare reform has not considered how ideology locks policy into a particular mode of development. Identifying and critiquing the ideological context within which welfare policy is created, however, provides a window of opportunity to push policy development in another direction. Furthermore, contextualizing welfare policies within the ideological context of neo-liberalism raises fundamentally important questions about how current welfare policy directions are redefining notions of citizenship. This redefinition of citizenship could have long term consequences for all of society in increasing social inequities and decreasing social cohesion (Coburn, 2000).

Second, I have suggested that welfare-to-work policies, while claiming gender neutrality, have actually been based on an implicit understanding of gender equality which assumes gender sameness. This understanding of gender, while seemingly progressive at first glance, overlooks the differential impacts of gender which still marginalize women today. Yet because most of the literature on welfare reform does not use a gender lens to analyze the impact of policies of welfare recipients, the gendered nature of the policy gets overlooked (see Baker & Tippin, 1999; Miranne, 1998; Monroe & Tiller, 2001; O'Connor, 1996; and Seccombe et al., 1999 for notable exceptions). Using a gender lens, policies which inherently, albeit subtly, discriminate against women in poverty could be made explicit.

Third, the non-economic impacts of welfare policy, while now receiving attention in the U.S, need further study within the Canadian context. Research that has been done suggests that policy makers have not adequately explored the health needs and limitations of welfare recipients, nor have they considered how childcare might prevent low-income individuals from seeking and maintaining employment. Much more work is needed to understand the longer-term implications of welfare reform for families living in poverty.

Finally, one aspect of this analysis is glaringly obvious in its absence. That is, "researchers need to give closer consideration to beneficiaries' responses to initiatives that work to change their motivations and behaviour, rather than seeing them as passive recipients of change" (Baker & Tippin, 1999, p. 264). Indeed, little is known about the perspectives and day-to-day experiences of those who are affected by welfare-to-work initiatives. Particularly, much needs to be learned about how welfare-to-work affects the day-to-day functioning of people moving through this transition. How do welfare-to-work reforms affect the day-to-day functioning of low-income families, particularly their health and well-being? How do welfare-to-work policies affect interactions between parents and their children? Where do welfare-to-work participants seek and find support? Further research will need to address these questions.

This Study

This study begins to address some of these gaps by offering a human ecological analysis grounded in critical feminist theory. By investigating the linkages between mandated welfare-to-work policies in Canada and the well-being of welfare recipients, I explicate the ways in which welfare policies in Alberta, while claiming gender neutrality, have particular implications for women. Furthermore, this study, through an exploration of the connections between welfare-to-work initiatives and the day-to-day lives of welfare participants, sheds light on the larger social, political and economic constructs which shape the lives of individuals. By exploring the environments in which individuals live, this analysis shows that how the day-to-day lives of welfare recipients are experienced reflects far more complexity than simple individual choices.

To examine the relationship between welfare to-work policies and welfare recipients' experiences, this study addressed three research questions:

1) What are the impacts of welfare-to-work initiatives on the well-being of families living in poverty, including their health, family-functioning and childcare arrangements?

2) How do the experiences of welfare recipients make visible the currently invisible connections between the day-to-day lives of welfare recipients and welfare policies implemented within a neo-liberal ideological framework?

3) What do the experiences of welfare-to-work participants tell us about current understandings of citizenship in contemporary Canada?

Through exploring these questions, this research contributes to the development of client-centered social policy initiatives for people in poverty, which governments increasingly identify as a high priority in policy development.

Chapter Three
Methodology and Methods

It is the knowledge or the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting.

Simone deBeauvoir

For this study I used the methodology developed by Dorothy E. Smith, known as Institutional Ethnography. A critical feminist methodology, institutional ethnography provides a framework to examine critically how the experiences of individuals are embedded within broader social, political and economic constructs (Devault, 1999). While the inquiry is grounded in the experiences of participants, it seeks to move beyond individual experiences in order to analyze the social, political and economic power structures, "the relations of ruling," from participants' various standpoints (Smith, 1987, 1998). Institutional ethnography thus provides a methodology with which to study power structures from the perspectives of those on the margins. In this research, institutional ethnography will be used to make *explicit* the *implicit* connections between the daily-lived experiences of welfare recipients with pre-school children and welfare-to-work initiatives.

In order to understand this methodology in all its complexity, it is important to situate it within the critical social science tradition to identify clearly its ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. Therefore, I have organized this chapter as follows. First, I discuss critical social science/critical theory more generally to show some of the key components of this research tradition. Then, I explain feminist standpoint epistemology, to provide the background for an understanding of institutional ethnography. I then situate institutional ethnography within the critical social science tradition, and explain its central tenets and assumptions. Finally, I discuss the reasons why institutional ethnography is an appropriate methodology with which to study the experiences of families in poverty as they make the transition from social assistance to employment.

Critical Social Science/Critical Theory

The critical social science tradition can be viewed as a meta-theory comprising a number of theories including neo-Marxist conflict theories and feminist theories (Creswell, 1998). While *critical social science* is, then, a "theory of science", the term *critical theory*, is a more substantive theory which focuses on the development of a "theory of society" (Fay, 1987). However, because the terms critical social science and critical theory are often used interchangeably in the literature, I will also use both terms interchangeably here.

Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) state that critical theory is "concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religions and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system" (p. 281). Fay (1987) states that the goal of critical social science is to explain, criticize and "overthrow" the social world. Citing Lynd (1939), Bubolz (1995) argues that the key question for a researcher with a critical science perspective is as follows: "Knowledge for What?" Bubolz argues that the "role of knowledge is more than discovering 'what is'; the function of knowledge is to understand each other, enlighten, emancipate, and bring about desirable change – in the direction of 'what should be'" (p. 3). Clearly, critical theory is a "value-laden" theory with the goal of transformation.

The emancipatory nature of critical social science is thus key to understanding its orientation. But emancipated from what? According to this theory, many marginalized people are estranged from their potential (Fay, 1987; Neuman 2000) due to the oppressive structures of society – such as ideology, and social, political and economic structures – what Smith (1987) would term the "relations of ruling." Fay (1987) points out that the idea that human existence is separated from its sources of energy has a long history in western thought both in the Christian tradition (alienation from God) and the secular tradition, through thinkers such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Heidegger. The objective of social science, then, is understood by critical theorists as "a critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves" (Neuman, 2000, p. 76). Transformation is a key goal of critical theorists.

Critical theory engages and draws from the work of Marx, however, it is crucial to note that there are important distinctions from Marx. While critical theorists in the 1960s recognized the domination and limitations of capitalism, they also saw the hope of liberation in new poststructuralist conceptions of human agency (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). Thus, in critical theory, the limitations to the individual of broader social, political and economic structures are understood. However, in critical theory, they are not deterministic. Rather, there is an opportunity for human agency, although the limitations of human agency are also recognized (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). A critical theorist's understanding of human agency closely parallels that of a human ecologist's understanding, with its recognition of agency within limits.

Critical theorists believe that there is a "true consciousness." When a person discovers this consciousness he or she will be transformed personally and work to transform systems (Guba, 1990). Critical theorists work to expose beliefs that are restrictive to individuals or groups (Neilsen, 1990). The goal of the critical theorist, then, is to emancipate particular groups of people from parts of society that are oppressive. In short, critical theorists challenge dominant ideologies in society, with the goal of societal transformation and freedom for groups of oppressed persons. The goal of transformation in critical theory dovetails nicely with the goal of human betterment in human ecology (Bubolz, 1995).

Guba (1990) argues that critical theorists, like positivists, have a critical realist ontology. In other words, they believe that there is truth "out there." However, critical theorists' understanding of reality differs from the understanding of positivists in significant ways. First, critical theorists understand truth within a context of multiple realities. While critical theorists espouse a notion of an objective reality, they do not believe that there can be objective knowledge. Second, critical theorists' sense of reality is "historical realism" (Neuman, 2000). In other words, critical theorists acknowledge that reality is constantly evolving because of the ever-changing nature of social, political, economic and cultural factors. According to this approach, knowledge is socially constructed because "every group is located socially and historically" and "there is no such thing as an objective or neutral or disinterested perspective" (Nielsen, 1990, p. 9). One can never fully understand reality due to the social construction of knowledge and the limitations of human capacity (Guba, 1990). In summary, while critical theorists believe in an objective truth (hence, a critical realist ontology), they also acknowledge multiple realities which makes them epistemological subjectivists who believe that "values mediate inquiry" (Guba, p. 25).

It is important to note that believing that knowledge is socially constructed is not the same as believing that there is no truth or objective reality. One can still believe that knowledge is socially constructed while acknowledging some notion of an objective reality. While the critical realist ontology might seem incompatible with a subjectivist epistemology, I would argue that the compatibility of this seeming contradiction becomes more clear with an understanding of feminist standpoint epistemology, to which I will now turn.

Feminist standpoint epistemology

Feminist standpoint epistemology is normally associated, and explained, within the framework of feminist theories. However, because many feminist theories also fit within the critical social science paradigm under the classification of critical feminist theory (which is also where institutional ethnography is situated), it is logical to explain feminist standpoint theory within a larger discussion of the critical tradition. Furthermore, I would argue that it is very difficult to understand the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of critical feminist theory without understanding feminist standpoint theory. As well, a thorough understanding of feminist standpoint theory is imperative to a solid understanding of institutional ethnography. Thus, I will explain feminist standpoint theory to further illuminate the basic assumptions of critical social science before I situate institutional ethnography within this paradigm.

Because critical theorists believe that realities are socially constructed, they encounter the dilemma of deciding which perspective is "more true." Guba (1990) describes the political nature of critical theory:

> If values *do* enter into every inquiry, then the question immediately arises as to what values and whose values shall govern. If the findings of studies can vary depending on the values chosen, then the choice of a *particular* value system tends to empower and enfranchise certain persons while

> disempowering and disenfranchising others. Inquiry thereby becomes a *political act* (Guba, p. 24, author's emphasis).

Feminist standpoint epistemology is one approach to dealing with the dilemma of critical theory.

Feminist standpoint epistemologists believe that people with less power in society are often able to see a more "complete" picture of society than those with more power, specifically because they are less powerful (Harding, 1987). Annas (1978) calls this "double vision" – "a knowledge, awareness of, and sensitivity to both the dominant world view of the society and their own minority" (as quoted in Nielsen, 1990, p. 10). For example, because women as a social group are subordinate to men, it is to the advantage of women to understand a male perspective of the world, whereas men comprising the dominant group are less likely to understand the female perspective.

Nielsen (1990) suggests that the implication that comes out of standpoint epistemology is that studying the understandings of oppressed group(s) "will lead to more accurate, more complex knowledge" (p. 23). Thus, with feminist standpoint epistemology, there is a potential for "transcendence" – that one could develop a more complete knowledge which could be liberating for some people. That critical theorists who embrace a feminist standpoint position believe that one position is "more right" than another position, demonstrates that they accept the notion of some sort of objective reality (Nielsen, 1990). This fits with Guba's (1990) interpretation that critical theorists, while acknowledging a subjective epistemology, also espouse a type of objective ontology.

If one accepts that ways of knowing are subjective, as critical realists do, the only alternative seems to be, as Nielsen (1990) points out, "a kind of relativism that is not very satisfying" (p. 28). She argues that there is a way out of this however. Citing Gadamer (1976), Nielsen (1990) argues that "it is precisely through the interplay between one's existing cognitions or values…and the elements of other cultures or new theories that one develops knowledge" (p. 28). The process of oscillating between old and new ideas is described by Gadamer as "fusion of horizons" and by Westkott (1983) as dialectical tension (as cited in Nielsen, 1990). The notion of dialectical tension, which originates with Hegel, suggests "discontinuities, oppositions, contradictions, tensions, and dilemmas that form part of women's concrete experience in patriarchal worlds – dilemmas that are realized only with a feminist consciousness" (Nielsen, 1990, p. 25). As Nielsen (1990) argues, the concepts of fusion and dialectical move beyond feminist standpoint epistemology because they allow for a "synthesis" of the new and the old at the interface of two potentially conflicting paradigms. Hence, a third way emerges. "[O]ne's view is enlarged and broadened by the clashing of two cultures; in this case… it is male-dominated versus feminist paradigms that clash" (Nielsen, 1990, p. 29). A critical theory paradigm thus offers an opportunity to look at the connection between the structural oppression and individual experiences of women and children in poverty, to expand knowledge for the purposes of societal transformation.

Institutional ethnography

Institutional ethnography (IE), as developed by Dorothy E. Smith, clearly fits within the critical social science tradition. The philosophical assumptions and objectives of institutional ethnography dovetail closely with those of critical social science. Like critical social science, institutional ethnography aims to explore, critique and change the social world. In addition, institutional ethnography, like critical social science, has the explicit objective to transform and emancipate. Finally, institutional ethnography, like critical social science, rejects the postmodern assumption of a relativist ontology of knowledge, while recognizing the existence of multiple viewpoints (Smith, 1998). It must be noted that Smith does not put herself in the traditional critical theorist camp, but rather identifies herself within the feminist camp. However, because various feminist theories also fit within the critical social science tradition, institutional ethnography may be appropriately categorized within the critical social science umbrella.

Dorothy Smith (1987, 1998), educated in the sociological tradition, was disillusioned with the traditional mode of sociological inquiry – the practice of going out to the field, bringing back knowledge and analyzing it from the perspective of, and for the benefit of, those in power or the "relations of ruling." Instead, she envisioned a sociology that would show a true insider's perspective. Rather than a sociology that benefits those in power through giving a window of insight into those living "on the margins", she envisioned a sociology where those on the margins would be able to look in toward those holding the power. In her vision of a new methodology, the direction of view would be reversed. Rather than the sociologist (in power) going into the field to observe, collect data and analyze data from the perspective of – and for the benefit of – the powerful, the sociologist would go to the margins and look toward the center of power structures to view these power structures from the perspective of those in the margins. Devault (1999) summarizes Smith's (1987) perspective:

> The institutional ethnographer takes up a point of view in a marginal location; she "looks" carefully and relatively unobtrusively, like any fieldworker, but she looks from *the margins inward* – toward centers of

> power and administration – searching to explicate the contingencies of ruling that shape local contexts (p. 48, emphasis added).

The result of this kind of inquiry is that knowledge is produced *for* those on the margins, rather than *about* those on the margins. The critique, then, becomes an "insider's critique" as it is rooted in the experiences of study participants.

The difference between ethnography and institutional ethnography, then, is the level of analysis. A traditional ethnographer describes what he or she sees. An institutional ethnographer goes beyond the individual experience to reveal the social relations that help to form the individual experience. While traditional ethnography seeks to understand the individual experience, the institutional ethnography uses the individual experience to understand the larger social processes that underlie that experience. In institutional ethnography, then, the goal of the inquiry is to reveal the larger social constructions which are tied to the individual experience. Campbell and Gregor (2002) summarize this approach:

> [U]nderlying anyone's everyday life experience, something invisible is happening to generate a particular set of circumstances. It is that "something" that is of research interest…Institutional ethnographers believe that people and events are *actually* tied together in ways that make sense of such abstractions as power, knowledge, capitalism, patriarchy, race, the economy, the state, policy, culture, and so on" (p. 17, emphasis in original).

Smith calls this process of explicating the relationship between experiences and social constructs the "mapping of social relations" (Smith, 1998).

While the inquiry is grounded in the experiences of participants, it seeks to move beyond the experience and analyze that experience with the "relations of ruling" (Smith, 1998). Smith explains that to view the "everyday world as problematic" is to view the everyday experiences as the starting point of the inquiry, not the end result.

> The language of the everyday world as it is incorporated into the description of that world is rooted in social relations beyond it and expresses relations not peculiar to the particular setting it describes...The particular "case" is not particular in the aspects that are of concern to the inquirer. Indeed it is not a "case" for it presents itself to us rather as a *point of entry*, the locus of an experiencing subject or subjects, into a larger social and economic process" (Smith, 1987, p. 156-157, emphasis added).

Furthermore, Smith explains that while the connections between the everyday/everynight experiences and the larger social processes are there, they are invisible and need to be explicated.

> The concept of problematic is used here to direct attention to a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles but are "latent" in the actualities of the experienced world (Smith, 1987, p. 91).

The challenge of the researcher, then, is to make visible the, as yet, invisible connections between experiences in the everyday and larger social processes.

Smith (1987) uses historical materialism (as developed by Marx) to analyze social settings to understand the historical and social construction of the organization of structures and the relations of ruling. Smith (1987) comments on her reading of Marx and Engels:

> They insist we start in the same world as the one we live in, among real individuals, their activities, and the material conditions of their activities. What

> is there to be investigated are the ongoing actual activities of real people. Nothing more or less. We are talking about a world that *actually happens* and can be observed, spoken of, and returned to to check up on the accuracy of an account or whether a given version of its faithful to how it actually works (p. 123, author's emphasis).

Institutional ethnography thus bases its inquiry in the actual everyday experiences of individuals. Two points should be made about this. First, while the institutional ethnographic mode of inquiry has a materialist foundation, like the larger critical social science tradition, it is not deterministic like the original writings of Marx. Rather, consistent with the larger critical social tradition and the human ecological framework, there is room for human agency. Smith (1998) states that "our local practices are both determined by and contribute to the social relations with which they are coordinated" (p. 227).

Second, while institutional ethnography is grounded in individual experience, it also allows for multiple views. The challenge of the researcher is to make the connections between the different viewpoints, understanding how particular individuals see the world from their various locations (Smith, 1987). This point underscores further how institutional ethnography fits with the ontology and epistemology of a critical social science paradigm: for both, multiple realities exist depending on where you are situated, but there is the notion of some sort of "single, organized whole" (Devault, 1999, p. 50). The multiple perspectives do not take away from a notion of objectivity; rather, the researcher tries to explicate, understand, and analyze the connections between the different viewpoints.

Smith uses Hegel's example of the master and the servant to explain feminist standpoint theory. In Hegel's parable, he shows how the master's notion of reality and the servant's notion of reality are dramatically different. From the master's standpoint, he asks for a particular object, and it is given. He thus views his relationship to the object as simple: he demands it and it is provided. The servant, on the other hand, sees the relationship between the master and the object very differently. From the servant's standpoint, the mediator between the master and the object is himself. It is only through his labour that the master obtains his object. *From the master's standpoint, the production of the object by the servant is invisible.*

Using Hegel's example, Smith (1987) suggests that the understanding of power from the standpoint of a successful man looks very different than the standpoint of a woman (say his wife) looking at the same thing. The powerful man would argue that he has earned entitlement to his power and status because of his initiative and hard work. From the standpoint of his wife, however, this may look very different. From where she stands, it becomes evident that her unpaid labour contributes to the status and power of her husband; in fact, his success would be impossible without her labour. Smith (1987) states: "Women are outside the extralocal relations of ruling, for the most part located in work processes that sustain it and are essential to its existence" (p. 79).

The same analogy could be used to explain a poor person's understanding of wealth as compared to a rich person's perspective. The rich man's perspective is that he earns his wealth and is therefore entitled to it. From the perspective of the poor person, however, the rich man obtains wealth through the labour and exploitation of the poor person. From the rich man's perspective, the social relations which create his wealth are invisible. From the poor person's standpoint, however, the invisible connection between the rich man's wealth and the poor person's labour are made known.

One point should be made about the concept of false consciousness within institutional ethnography. Where critical theorists argue that one of the goals of research is to emancipate oppressed groups from false consciousness, Smith does not address this. However, in critically reading Smith's work, I think she would argue that knowledge which comes from viewing the relations of ruling from the margins is developed through the standpoint of an oppressed person's *experiences*, not their perspectives. In other words, the oppressed person may not have a clear understanding of how he or she is oppressed; however, his or her experiences reveal this. Thus, whatever the perspective of the participant, it is his or her experiences that show power imbalances and the ways in which a person's daily life is organized by larger social processes. The institutional ethnographer may be interested in gleaning the perspectives of the participants, but the analysis of power structures comes from a close examination of participants' *experiences.*

Rationale for using institutional ethnography for this study

There are a number of qualitative research methodologies that could be used effectively to study the experiences of low-income families as they move from social assistance to employment. Grounded theory, for example, could be used to develop a theory about the process of moving from welfare to work. Phenomenology could be used to explore in-depth, the "essence" of the experience of living on the margins. Traditional ethnography could be used to describe the experiences of women and their children as they move from welfare to work. Institutional ethnography, however, is an especially appropriate methodology for studying the experiences of welfare recipients with pre-school children as they make the transition from social assistance to the labour market. Its strength as a methodology for this kind of research is evident in a number of ways.

First, institutional ethnography's basis in feminist research means that it gives room for the researcher to consider *gender* as a critical category of analysis. The primary goal of feminist research is to examine the female experience, as it has been overlooked historically (Harding, 1987). Using a gender analysis in research examining the experiences of women in poverty is important as gender has often been overlooked in studying welfare reform (Baker and Tippin, 1999; O'Connor, 1996). Lather (1991) indicates that feminist research has the ultimate goal of correcting "both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991, p. 71). Including gender analysis in this study, then, leaves room for developing new understandings of the experiences of women in poverty as they move from welfare to work.

Second, institutional ethnography can be used, not only to *examine* the experiences of marginalized people, but also to *connect* these experiences to larger social processes. As Smith emphasizes: "The aim is not to explain people's behaviour but to be able to explain to them/ourselves the socially organized powers in which their/our lives are embedded and to which their/our activities contribute" (Smith, 1998, p. 8). Institutional ethnography thus provides a methodological framework to examine critically the ways in which welfare-to-work participants' experiences intersect with the policies underlying welfare-to-work programs.

Smith uses a powerful analogy which demonstrates why institutional ethnography is uniquely appropriate for studying marginalized women and children who are making the transition from welfare to work. When Smith (1987) describes her conceptualization of "the fault line" – the disconnect she saw between women's experiences and the larger culture around them – she uses an illustration from a short story of Doris Lessing (Smith, 1987). Lessing describes a girl who grew-up in Africa but was educated in the British literary tradition. The language, moral development, culture, worldview, and even the countryside which developed the girl's understanding and "consciousness" through her education were completely different than the world she experienced in Africa. "Her own landscape, its forms of life, her immediate everyday world do not fully penetrate and occupy her consciousness. *They are not named*" (Smith, 1987, p. 36, emphasis added). In short, there was a disconnect between what the girl learned from discourse, and what she knew from her immediate world.

The same argument can be made about families living in poverty in our society. Much of what is "known" to people in poverty from their experiences does not fit with the "known truths" of the dominant discourse. People in poverty hear rhetoric daily that does not fit with their everyday experiences. For example, the dominant discourse tells us something like this:

> *Canada is a rich country; people in Canada are privileged to have the (third) highest standard of living in the world; working equals having money, and the harder you work the more money you will have; each of us can do it on our own if we really try; we should be financially independent in order to be moral, contributing citizens; work will lead to meaning and fulfillment; and working will set a good example for your children (United Nations, 2002; Government of Canada, 2002b).*

Yet most (or all) of this rhetoric clashes with the experiences of people in poverty. In contrast, their discourse might look something like this.

> *Canada is rich but I am poor. Working is supposed to be equivalent to having money but I have even less money when I work than when I'm on welfare. Somehow I can't do it on my own, I need others to help me meet my daily needs and take care of my kids. Working often makes me feel exhausted, defeated, overwhelmed, depressed and humiliated and I don't find meaning in my work; when I leave my children to work I feel guilty.*

Using institutional ethnography as a road map, I have the opportunity to hear the stories of families in poverty to explore the "fault line" between their individual experiences and the dominant discourse. Furthermore, I can work to make visible the currently invisible connections between marginalized women's everyday experiences and the larger social processes that organize those experiences.

Institutional ethnography is suited for studying families on the margins because it looks at the power structures that help to create their worlds *from their standpoints*. It has been noted in research on welfare reform that the perspectives and experiences of participants themselves are often overlooked (See, for example, Baker & Tippin, 1999; Yoshikawa & Hsueh, 2001). Looking at the relations of ruling (e.g., the social welfare system, the healthcare system, and economic and political structures) through the eyes and experiences of women on the margins can give them a fuller understanding of the social processes which shape their lives, and which they participate in shaping. Also, because Smith emphasizes that the knowledge created is intended for the participants themselves, and not for the benefit of the relations of ruling, it has an opportunity to lead to emancipation built on increased knowledge and understanding.

A third reason that institutional ethnography is suitable for studying families in poverty is that, consistent with the critical tradition, there is an *action* component associated with the research. Using institutional ethnography, the researcher conducts research to make change. In this case, the goal of the research is to make explicit the connections between individual experience and larger social processes for the benefit of the research participants, as well as to construct knowledge that will inform the work of policy makers and agencies who work on welfare policy construction and implementation. Institutional ethnography goes beyond traditional ethnography as it includes a political objective by asking "questions about fundamental policy, power and dominance issues" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 3). By giving voice to politically and economically marginalized people, and by examining their experiences within the context of existing power structures, the intent is to engage participants in developing recommendations for policy change in order to transform social policy to better meet the needs of poor families.

It should be noted that while institutional ethnography has a goal of transformation, it is not a "call to arms." Rather, institutional ethnography provides solid knowledge for activists to use (Smith, 1998). "The institutional ethnographic approach to social change thus assumes a division of labor between scholars and activists – or at least a distinction between moments of inquiry and activism" (Devault, 1999, p. 53). In other words, Smith (1998) articulates that research requires specific skills and that researchers should focus their efforts on developing those skills; similarly, activism requires specialized skills which should be honed by activists. The goal of institutional ethnography, then, is to provide strong evidence and understanding for participants and activists to use. The role of activism in institutional ethnography, then, is different than in a participatory action research approach which has an action component built right into its methodology.

Summary

Critical theorists challenge dominant ideologies in society, with the goal of societal transformation and freedom for groups of oppressed persons. Within the critical social science tradition, feminist critical theorists have added much insight into research from the perspective of those on the margins through theoretical and methodological developments from feminist standpoint epistemology. As one particularly influential methodology within this tradition, institutional ethnography provides a way in which to study power structures *from the perspective of those on the margins.* Institutional ethnography is particularly appropriate for studying families moving from welfare to work because it considers gender as a category of analysis, shows the connection between marginalized people's experiences and larger social processes, uses impoverished people's standpoints to understand complex power structures, and provides knowledge which can lead to societal change. Nielsen (1990) states that an "important way in which feminist research constitutes a paradigm shift is exemplified by the many reinterpretations, reconstructions, and reanalyses of existing data from the new perspective" (p. 20). Using institutional ethnography, I have an opportunity to shed new light on conventional ways of thinking.

Methods

In this section, I review the methods I employed in this study. I first give a detailed account of the recruitment strategies, sample description, data collection process, and data analysis. Then, I identify my voice as a researcher, and reflect on the ethical challenges I encountered as I conducted this research. In the final section of this chapter, I identify the strengths and limitations of this study.

To investigate the interface between mandated welfare-to-work policies in Canada and the experiences of welfare recipients with pre-school children, I conducted a one-year study using semi-structured interviews to collect in-depth qualitative data. Participants were selected using purposive sampling (Thomas, 1993) in order to hear the experiences of people directly impacted by welfare-to-work policies. Through the use of in-depth interviews, I was able to elicit participants' detailed descriptions of their families' experiences related to welfare-to-work initiatives, probing the economic and non-economic impacts of welfare-to-work programs.

Initial interviews were done with twenty-six (26) families: twenty-three (23) of these families were from Edmonton, and three (3) families were from a rural northern Albertan town. I conducted two additional in-depth interviews in six month intervals over the course of one year with one parent in 17 of the original 26 families, to explore families' experiences as they made the transition from welfare to work. By conducting three interviews with each family throughout the year, I was able to capture a full annual cycle of family dynamics (e.g., school, holidays, etc.) and a reasonable period of transition between social assistance and employment-related activities. This analysis focuses on the 17 families I was able to follow throughout the year.

I completed a total of 60 in-depth interviews between May 23, 2001 and October 23, 2002. The interviews were done over this time period to meet the objectives of a larger research project known as "The Welfare-to-work Research Project," for which I was hired as a Research Assistant to conduct the qualitative piece of the study.

Setting and recruitment strategies

Participants for this study were selected from a large Canadian City, Edmonton, as well as one rural community in Alberta, roughly 150 km north of Edmonton. Two strategies were used to identity participants. First, posters were placed in agencies where low-income families were most likely to frequent (eg., Candora Society, Norwood Community Centre, The Edmonton Food Bank, etc.).

(See Appendix A). In addition, The Community Network Strategy (CNS) (Welshimer, 1995) was employed to locate potential participants. Beginning with agencies and organizations within the community, the CNS uses community networking to locate potential participants not necessarily connected to formal agencies. Using this process, I identified agencies, contacted their managers, and was connected with employees who have contacts with community members (often outreach workers and other community workers). My hope was that these agency contacts would suggest community contacts who would then be able to identify and facilitate contact with potential research participants not necessarily connected to agencies. See Appendix B for an information sheet that community contact people could use as a guide when they talked with potential participants about the study.

While I hoped that the CNS would be an excellent way of recruiting research participants who are not well connected to formal social service agencies, but whose knowledge and experience would be useful for my research project, I did not have much success with this process. Although eight participants were recruited using the CNS process, I was only able to retain four of them for the duration of the study (50%). I had more success with recruitment within employability programs designed for welfare-to-work participants. I visited four employability programs, and was able to recruit 18 participants, 13 of whom I was able to retain throughout the research project (72%). To recruit participants through employability programs, I used the following process. First, I contacted the agency directors to gain access to their programs. The agency directors then referred me to program managers, who in turn, put me in touch with program facilitators. With the consent of the program facilitators, another research team member and I conducted a short presentation, explaining the purpose and process of the welfare-to-work research project. During the class break, participants had an opportunity to volunteer for the study. After obtaining their telephone numbers, I gave the potential participants a follow-up call, determined whether or not they met the criteria for the study, answered additional questions posed by the participants, and arranged for a first interview.

Sample description

As mentioned previously, 26 families were recruited for this study. Families were recruited until theoretical saturation (Thomas, 1993) was reached – that is until no new themes or issues arose in data collection. Previous ethnographic studies about the effects of welfare-to-work policies have involved 15-30 families (see Hagen & Davis, 1994; Miranne, 1998; Oliker, 1995; Seccombe et al. 1999). Thus, this study used a similarly sized sample. Selection criteria for this sample included:

- Families with incomes at or below the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Offs (LICOs) who have at least one child less than 5 years of age. (Appendix C outlines the LICOs for 2001).
- Families who were beginning the transition from social assistance to the labour market. These families were commencing mandated employment-related programs such as life skills, job training, post-secondary education, job placements, and jobs.
- Parents who were able to articulate verbally their experiences in English.
- Parents who were willing and able to consent to taped interviews.

The 26 participants who completed the first interview came from a variety of welfare-to-work initiatives. Six participants came from a full-time six-month employability program intended to target high-barrier women who had left situations of domestic violence. Seven other participants came from a full-time, one-year employability program which included personal development, resume and interview skill development, life skills, job search, and on-the-job training. Five other participants came from a part-time pre-employability program for women who were considered to have particularly high barriers to employment. Six participants, including the rural participants, were recruited using the Community Network Strategy, and two participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

My goal was to complete interviews throughout the year with 15-20 families. Therefore, I over sampled for my first round of interviews, anticipating that I would lose some of the participants through attrition along the way. This proved to be a prudent decision because I lost a significant number of participants between the first and second set of interviews. For the first round of interviews, I interviewed 26 people, 23 mothers, one father, and two grandmothers. Nine of these participants were lost between the first and second round of interviews. Between the second and third round of interviews, I lost one participant and gained one back, which meant that I did 17 interviews for the second and third rounds. I was pleased with the retention between these two sets of interviews, and felt confident that I had more than enough data to work with.

Of the participants that remained in the study for the entire year of data collection for this study, 13 were recruited from employability programs, one from a daycare, one from a parent support group, one from a community health program, and finally one was a "snowball" who was referred by another participant. The sample consisted of four general groups. First, there were three participants from a pre-employability program for people who were considered high-barrier social assistance clients. This was a part-time program that focused on personal development and job preparedness, including a work-experience component. Second, there were five participants from an intensive full-time six-month employability program for abused women. This program was classified as an employment program designed to provide "a range of employment services to women in Edmonton whose primary barrier to employment is a history of domestic abuse" (AHRE, 2001b, p. 9). Third, there were five participants in an intensive full-time, 12-month employability program for social assistance recipients. The intent of this program was "to provide a long term comprehensive employment program for multiple barried (sic) SFI recipients" (AHRE 2001b, p. 8). Finally, there was a group of "independents" who were recruited elsewhere. These four participants, while required by Supports For Independence to find a suitable job-training program or actively seek work in order to qualify for welfare benefits, were not in formal employability programs, but found other ways to fulfill their requirements. One of these participants just started part-time employment when I met her, two were looking for work, and one was in a 12-month training program to become a legal secretary.

Reasons for participant attrition

There were three main reasons that participants discontinued involvement in the study, which I have documented in detail in my field notes. First, five participants moved to another city and I was unable to reestablish contact with three of them (11% of all study participants). Second, many participants (over half) had their phones disconnected over the duration of the study. While I was able to reestablish contact with most of them through friends or family, I was unable to locate three of them (11%). Third, three participants did not return my calls (11%). For whatever reason, they chose to terminate their participation in the study.

The highest retention rate was for participants recruited from the two full-time employability groups (71% for the twelve-month group, and 83% for the six-month group). The poorest retention rate was in the rural group, where I was only able to retain one of the three original participants (33%). One explanation for this attrition is that the two full-time groups were generally more "employment ready" than the other groups I interviewed, suggesting that their lives were more stable, which made it easier for me to keep in touch. The other two groups, the part-time employability program group, and the group of "independents" who were not in any formal employability groups, had a retention rate each of 60%. Overall, these groups were more stable than the rural group, but less stable than those in the full-time employability programs. The persons in the program for high-barrier women, I propose, were quite unstable and therefore more difficult to stay in touch with. The independents were more likely to lack formal social supports, and this may have impacted their ability to participate for the duration of my research project.

Although I was disappointed to lose so many participants after the first round of interviews, I recognize that the participants I was working with have complex and difficult lives that made it difficult for them to complete the research project. While I experienced personal pressure to maintain contact with as many participants as possible, I had to remember that their consent to participate was critical. I could not pressure them to participate, as much as I felt that I needed their interviews.

Data collection

The main tool for data collection in this study was in-depth interviews. I conducted all interviews myself. Fifty-eight out of the sixty interviews were conducted in person. All of these interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim by transcribers hired by the Welfare-to-Work Research Project. Two of the interviews in the final round of interviewing were done via the telephone, as the participants had moved to another province. Discussion from these telephone interviews was recorded by hand throughout the interview.

This research was conducted using a semi-structured interview format. Semi-structured interviews are designed to seek information about a particular topic, covering various domains of knowledge, while still maintaining the flexibility of an unstructured interview. Therefore, an interview guide is developed before research interviews begin, to shape the course of the interview and ensure that particular areas of interest are considered (Bernard, 1995). However, the interviewer is free to probe at certain points to elicit more in-depth information, and ask questions in a different order than indicated on the interview guide. This interview style allows for consistent data to be collected, while leaving room for important and enriching details to emerge.

The interview guides (Appendix D) were developed using Spradley's (1979) recommendations. The purpose of the initial interview was to explain the study thoroughly; begin to develop rapport with the participant; obtain a general overview of the participant's life story; and ask introductory questions about the participant's involvement with welfare-to-work programs, probing how this participation had impacted the health and well-being, family-functioning, and childcare arrangements of participants and their children. Subsequent interviews involved eliciting in-depth, focused, descriptive accounts of families' everyday experiences of the transition from welfare to work. This included the identification of connections between families' lived experiences related to welfare-to-work and the broad range of policies (e.g., income security, labour market, health, education, and social services) that are integral to the recent welfare-to-work trend in Canada.

The interviews averaged approximately one hour in length, although they varied from 45 minutes to three hours. As the interviewer, I was sensitive to the individual needs of each participant and made time adaptations as required. The circumstances surrounding some interviews required that they be shorter or longer. For example, there were times when children were present and requiring attention, and it became clear that the interview needed to be as efficient as possible in order to meet the needs of the participant and her child. At other times, the participant wanted to talk about things that were not particularly relevant to my topic of interest. However, I felt it was important that participants have an opportunity to discuss topics pressing to them as well, and therefore allowed them an opportunity to discuss things that were "off-topic."

The majority of the interviews (49 out of 60) were done in the participants' homes. On a few occasions, I met with participants at the location of their welfare-to-work program because the time and location were most convenient for the participant. In these cases, the interview was conducted in a private room within the agency. There were advantages and disadvantages to different locations for the interview. Doing interviews in the participant's home was ideal in many ways, because the interview was conducted on the participant's turf, and the power differential seemed to be somewhat reduced, as I was a guest going into the participant's home. Here, the participant could offer me a beverage and decide where the interview would take place within his or her home (usually the kitchen table was chosen). Also, going into the home gave me an opportunity to observe the environment in which the participant lived. This enabled me to get a better sense of the day-to-day conditions under which the participant lived. Often, for example, I was able to observe the amount of food in the fridge because the participant would open the fridge to get something for me, his/her children, or him/herself. Unlike the cluttered, packed nature of my fridge and many others whom I know, I noticed that many of the refrigerators in these homes were quite bare. This was an insight I would not have obtained had I not had an opportunity to go into the participants' homes.

On the other hand, there were clear advantages to doing interviews in the agency setting rather than the participants' homes. For a few initial interviews, I had the sense some participants were concerned about me coming to their homes. Although I asked all of the participants where they would like to hold the interviews, in specific cases where I sensed discomfort, I emphasized that the interview could be conducted at an agency. In these cases, it seemed that the participant preferred "neutral turf" where s/he did not feel that I was infringing on her/his privacy. Having me come to her/his home may have felt too much like a social worker or a child welfare worker coming in to assess her lifestyle. Interestingly, I was invited into the participants' homes for all subsequent interviews if I did the first interview in an agency setting.

Another advantage of doing interviews in agency settings was that interruptions from children were eliminated. This was a clear advantage that was not guaranteed within the home setting. When meeting with participants in their homes, I attempted to arrange interviews when children were in childcare, napping, or in bed for the night. However, these arrangements did not always work. While most parents effectively found ways to create a peaceful interview situation through arranging some sort of childcare, there were a few occasions when interviews were conducted with children at home. There were a number of reasons for this. Sometimes parents were insistent that their children would just play or watch television throughout the interview; children do not always sleep when their parents want them to; and childcare arrangements fall through. So, I experienced numerous interruptions from children during some of the interviews. While I had anticipated this barrier and attempted to problem-solve it by taking toys and videos to the interviews, I soon discovered that my toys and videos were not useful. Children had their own toys and many of them did not have video machines. On the few occasions I did present my toys, I found it difficult and unfair to ask the children to now give the toys back because I was leaving. So, despite my attempts and the participant's attempts to minimize interruptions, the children were usually interested in remaining with their parent and the "new person." Sometimes the children seemed disturbed by the attention I was demanding of their parent; at other times they seemed interested in playing with me because I was someone new in the household. In these cases, I ended up turning off the recorder a lot while the parent attempted to distract the children. Ultimately, these interview situations were not ideal, but unavoidable. All that could be done was to conduct the interview as effectively as possible despite the inevitable interruptions.

Interviewing participants over the course of a year proved to be a fruitful endeavour. While the purpose of this semi-longitudinal interview format was to document the transition from welfare to work over an extended period of time, I also found that it was beneficial for enriching existing data. Because I had begun to develop relationships with the participants, they began to trust me with information they did not share in the first interview. For example, when asking about health status, I learned in the second interview that a few of the participants were recovering alcoholics. Although the participants did not offer this information in the first interview, they chose to disclose this sensitive information during a subsequent interview. Multiple interviews thus served to enhance the data and give more detailed descriptions of daily struggles.

Following each interview, I recorded extensive field notes. Bernard (1995) states that there are three kinds of field notes: descriptive field notes which discuss the setting and content of the data collection; notes on methods and techniques used for data collection; and notes that provide analysis and discuss issues or events that arose during the data collection. Using Bernard's guidelines, I incorporated the following information in my field notes: a summary of the interview; thoughts about the interview process; insights gleaned from the interview; connections made between this interview and other interviews previously conducted; and observations about the setting in which the interview took place.

Not in service

It is interesting to note that well over half of my participants lost and/or changed their phone numbers during the course of the year. Early on, I had been advised to ensure that I received contact numbers in addition to the participants' phone numbers. This advice was very useful, as many of the participants and some of their contacts lost their telephone numbers. Between the second and third interviews, I ensured that I had at least two contact numbers for the participants.

This worked well, and helped me to retain participants that I would have otherwise lost, due to the inability to contact them.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis might be best described as an art rather than a science. It is an inductive, iterative, and continuous process of trying to "make sense" of large volumes of data collected throughout the course of interviews, observations, field notes, reflections, and other textual data. Qualitative data analysis can also be thought of less as a set of techniques and more as a particular analytical approach that is brought to the data (Silverman, 2000). The process is complex and reflective.

The methodological approach used in this study is institutional ethnography (as explained at the beginning of this chapter). In developing this methodology, Smith devised an approach to analysis to preserve the experiences of study participants. According to Smith (1998), the text, if written in a way true to institutional ethnography, serves as "the bridge between the everyday/everynight local actualities of our living and the ruling relations" (p. 7). In other words, the text explicates the connection between larger social, economic and political constructs and the individual's day-to-day experiences.

Smith outlines two basic principles for analyzing experiences that preserve the voices of those studied. First, the researcher must maintain the integrity of individual lives through grounding the inquiry into the everyday "puzzles" of their experiences, not into abstract intellectual concepts. This point is crucial. The researcher must approach the data with an awareness that the goal is to understand what *the data* state rather than an attempt to fit the data into predetermined conceptual frameworks. Second, the researcher must look outwards toward social processes to understand how individual lives are organized. Thus, while the analysis begins with understanding the data, the end goal is to analyze what the data reveal about the social processes that organize the complex matrices of individual lives. Figure 2 shows the fundamental difference between traditional ethnography and institutional ethnography. In traditional ethnography, the field worker views the experiences of persons living on the margins from the perspective of those in power. In contrast, the institutional ethnographer positions him/herself on the margins of society and views the locus of power, or relations of ruling, from the perspective of marginalized persons. The institutional ethnographer, then, reveals the connections between the "relations of ruling" and individual lives through starting his/her inquiry with individual experience, while looking outward to see how that individual experience is organized from without.

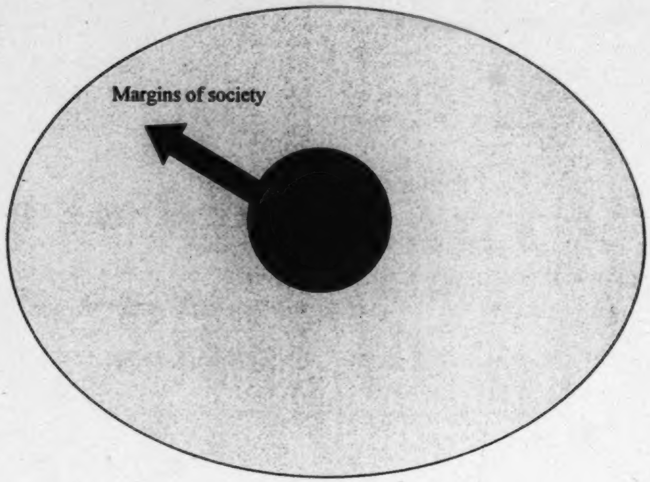
Description of data analysis process

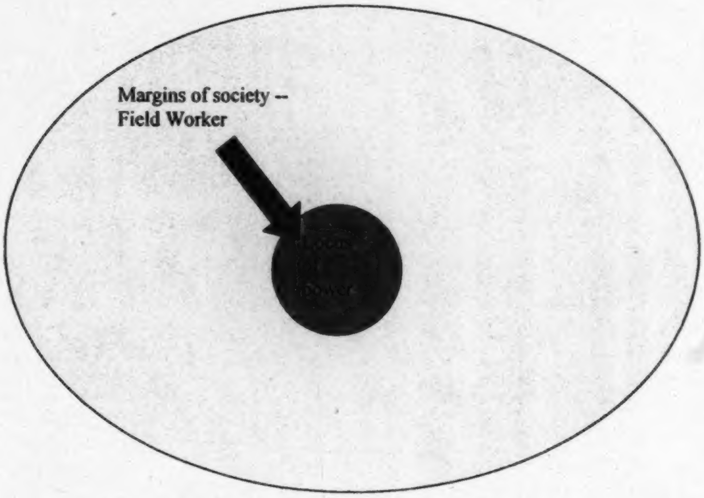
Having emphasized that there is no clear recipe book of techniques about how to analyze qualitative data, it must be noted that several strategies are commonly used in qualitative data analysis in order to manage, organize and find meaning in the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) indicate that there are three main steps to effective data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusions drawing/verification. Data reduction involves reducing the data into manageable chunks of information that can be systematically analyzed. Systematic analysis is achieved throughout the process of the qualitative study and includes choosing the conceptual framework, developing the interview schedule, writing summaries of transcripts and field notes, and coding of data.

The process of qualitative data analysis, while exciting, is laborious, as other qualitative researchers have noted (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 2001). To engage in the process of data analysis for my research I proceeded as follows. Data analysis began with the first interview. Upon completing each interview, I took extensive field notes to ensure that I would retain important thoughts and insights from the interview. In these notes, I detailed how I felt the interview went, observations about the interview or the setting in which the interview took place, and a summary of the interview. Preliminary "open coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) began after the first set of interviews was complete. I colour coded the first set of interviews both to familiarize myself with the data and begin to derive possible themes and to create the interview guides that would be used for subsequent interviews. As I conducted other interviews, I compared interviews, adapted questions to check for possible themes, and noted interesting points. When completing the second and third sets of interviews, I re-read the previous interviews, to familiarize myself with the previous transcripts before completing the next interview.

When the interviews from all three points of data collection were transcribed, I began the long process of rigorous and comprehensive coding and analysis. In order to accomplish this task, I proceeded as follows. First, I began to cluster the data through organizing all of my data by individual. For each participant, I compiled all field notes and the transcripts from the three interviews conducted with that individual. I put this information together in one file folder for each participant. When I was finished this process, I had a total of 17 files for the 17 participants whom I was

Figure 2. Traditional Ethnography: Field worker views the margins from the standpoint of those within the locus of power


Margins of society


Margins of society --
Field Worker
Locus
of
power

Institutional Ethnography: Field worker goes to the margins and views the locus of power from the standpoint of marginalized persons able to follow throughout the entire year, and another file which included data from the other 9 participants with whom I was unable to maintain contact. The data in the 17 files of complete sets of interviews comprised approximately 1250 pages, and it was these data that I focused on in my analysis.

Based on the codes I had originally developed when I conducted the first round of preliminary coding on the first set of interviews, I began to code each complete data cluster for each participant. As I read through the first several files, I modified, added, and/or deleted codes, and added detail to existing codes to indicate which sorts of information would be coded under each category (see Appendix E for a summary of the stages of coding used in this analysis). I then discussed my codes with supervisors and several colleagues, to ensure that they made sense. My final coding at this stage of the process included 12 overarching codes.

To code the data, I went through each participant's file systematically, reading the field notes for all the interviews first, and then the transcripts in chronological order. As I went through these transcripts, I coded each part, according to the coding template I had created. Some chunks of data in the transcripts were coded more than once if I thought the data were relevant to more than one area. I also made notes in the margins of the hard copy of the transcript, and created a data analysis template for each participant to summarize key points in the data. Upon completing the process of coding for each file, I created a summary of that participant's experience, including her/his human capital, her/his experiences with the welfare-to-work transition, her/his perspectives on welfare, key policy initiatives that impacted her/him, survival strategies s/he used to deal with poverty, the health status of her/himself and his/her children, and her/his reflections on family-functioning and childcare arrangements as s/he went through the welfare-to-work process.

After completing the coding, summary, and data analysis template for each file, I inputted the coded transcripts into the software program N'Vivo, to do subsequent data organization. When all of the coded interviews were entered into N'Vivo, I created electronic files which compiled all information for one particular code from all interviews. For instance, I had all the information coded as "health" from each interview compiled into one file. I then printed off the data by code. I now had 12 files of data, sorted by code. Upon completing this process of coding, summarizing, and inputting data into N'Vivo, I proceeded to review the data again, as organized by code. As I reviewed the data again, I began my thematic development using the constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to begin in-depth analysis of data. This method involves comparing two or more items (i.e., patterns of thought or behaviour) or key events and looking for similarities and differences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through comparing chunks of coded data to look for commonalities, a process called "axial coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I discovered interrelationships between some of the codes and chose to merge these codes to create more comprehensive themes. For example, I merged the codes "family-functioning and childcare" to create the theme "work/family balance." I then created a comprehensive data chart, including references to data from each of the participants to look for connections and additional themes. From this point forward, I began to write the descriptive findings from my data.

After completing a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the data, I conducted a critical analysis to make explicit connections between the experiences of participants and social policies. When the institutional ethnographer gets to this stage of critical analysis, it is important for him or her to remember that social relations are key to the research interest (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). At this point, rather than chunk data into themes, the researcher needs to see the data in its totality to understand how individual experiences are structured by larger social, political and economic processes. This analysis begins with participants' experiences and works backwards. Campbell and Gregor (2002) explain:

> Getting to an account that explicates *the social relations* of the setting is what an institutional ethnographic account is about. This kind of analysis uses what informants know and what they are observed doing for the analytic purpose of identifying, tracing and describing the social relations that extend beyond the boundaries of any one informant's experiences…Translocal and discursively- organized relations permeate informants' understanding, talk and activities (p. 90, author's emphasis).

The challenge for the researcher is to read the data, puzzle through its meaning and show how participants' stories reveal the ways in which individuals' activities are organized. When a participant tells a story that alludes to a policy impact, the researcher reviews the policy and determines whether or not there is a connection between the policy statement and the individual story. For example, when a participant explains how her social assistance cheque is reduced when her child tax credit is increased, the task of the institutional ethnographer is to research the policies that may structure this individual experience. If a connection is explicated, the researcher shows how this policy structures the individual experience, thus revealing the practical, everyday implications of this policy for an individual living on social assistance. Thus, while "there is no technical fix" for doing institutional ethnography, careful reading, reflection and analysis allow for implicit connections between individual experiences and policies to be made explicit (Campell & Gregor, p. 93).

To engage the critical piece of this study, I drew upon a preliminary analysis of the welfare-to-work policies in the Province of Alberta, done by another research assistant within the Welfare-to-Work Research Team, Kay Cook, in order to reveal the connection between the experiences of the participants and the values, reasoning, and assumptions underlying recent welfare reforms in Alberta specifically and Canada generally. The policy analysis that I drew upon involved several components. An overview of the political party, leadership, governmental department structure, and major act, laws and programs were summarized. Relevant secondary literature and primary policy documents were reviewed, highlighting the following content: the policy problem identified within the document; characteristics of the particular act, policy or program; and a description of the justification given by the government for how terms were defined, how policy problems were identified, and how policy decisions were implemented and outcomes measured. In addition to using the existing policy analysis, I also reviewed and analyzed policy documents relevant to participants in my study, including the Supports for Independence Policy Manual, the AHRE website, provincial government annual reports, and brochures and booklets given to welfare recipients, in order to determine how policy changes have impacted welfare recipients with pre-school children.

Explicating the connections between the policy and participant experiences involved an iterative process of re-reading the transcripts holistically to ask myself: "what are these participant experiences telling me about the processes which shape their lives?" For instance, in reviewing the many stories, I began to see how the experiences of participants in accessing childcare were much more complex than was shown by simply reviewing the text of childcare policies. I thus began to see a connection between the individual experiences of participants, and the text which shaped those experiences. Hence, while the bulk of the data analysis process involved the break-down of data into smaller "palatable" chunks, this component of the data analysis process entailed reflection upon the various components of the data together in order to understand their meaning comprehensively.

Researcher's Voice

Feminist methodologists have challenged the assumption of positivists that research can be free of bias (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Reinharz, 1992). Consequently, feminists such as Reinharz (1992) have proposed that a more realistic, and ultimately more honest research orientation, is to name bias, or research voice, up-front, at the inception of a study. As a feminist researcher, I thus acknowledge that my voice is woven into the development of this study and into my work as a researcher and advocate. Here, I endeavour to identify factors which have influenced my "researcher voice", as well as identify what that voice is.

Having been raised in a rural, farm environment with a large extended family, I was taught two fundamental beliefs that relate to this study: that families should "take care of their own," and that hard work leads to success. However, through my work for the past 19 years with various groups of marginalized persons -- homeless men, young offenders, aboriginal people, battered women, and most recently, the participants of this study – I have learned that many people in society do not have informal support networks to draw upon, and that not everyone has the same opportunity or ability to succeed in work. I have thus developed a strong belief that formal systems of support are needed, and indeed, are the only ethical response to meeting the needs of citizens within a civil society.

My post-secondary education has also greatly influenced my research voice. Because I have an educational background which spans a number of disciplines, I have been able to sift through various ways of understanding epistemology and ontology, and developed a comprehensive theoretical perspective which I would describe as that of a critical-realist, feminist, constructivist, and standpoint theorist. This orientation, while grounded in academic theory, has necessarily been informed by, and enriched, by my work experience.

The strength of my voice as a practitioner and a researcher, I think, has been my ability to position myself from the standpoint of the person telling me his or her story. I have consciously been reflective in attempting to understand stories that are beyond the scope of my life experience. Through careful reflection about my reaction to others' stories, and through hearing multiple stories, I have been able to ask, *not* what *I* would do in their place, but where I might be in my life if I had the same background, experiences, oppression, and hardship. I have come to realize that I cannot possibly put myself in someone else's shoes. Rather, by listening to many stories with similar themes, I have begun to develop a perspective that people's life experiences are shaped by the contexts in which they live. Individual choices are made at times within contexts of "non-choice." As a researcher, practitioner, and advocate, my approach has been to view people's experiences and choices through a lens that contexualizes their lives within a larger framework of environments.

I have approached this research with the conviction that I do not have the answers to other people's life stories. Thus, while I have particular ideals, I have had enough exposure to others' experiences, at times radically different than my own, that I feel I can approach them, not with objectivity, but with a commitment to hear their stories as told by them within their contexts. I have approached data collection and analysis for this study from this perspective, and thus feel that the findings will be representative of participants' experiences, not my own.

Ethical Implications

Ethics approval was given for this research through the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics Faculty Research Ethics Board in March, 2001 (see Appendix F). To address the potential ethical implications of this study at its inception, I used Marshall and Rossman's (1995) questions as guidelines. They ask: "Will the proposed strategy violate the participants' privacy or unduly disrupt their everyday worlds? Are they putting themselves in danger or at risk by participating in this study? Will the study violate their human rights in some way?" (Marshall & Rossman, p. 42). Below, I address these concerns in relation to this study as required by the Ethics Board. However, upon doing the study, I felt that ethical issues went deeper then simply addressing issues of benefits, risk, consent and confidentiality. Thus, after I address standard ethical issues, I will reflect on some ethical challenges that I experienced in conducting this data collection.

Benefits of research to participants/community

Although the benefits to participants of taking part in this study were few, there were three areas that participants reported as helpful. First, participants were given a $20.00 grocery gift certificate for each interview in which they participated. Many participants indicated that this gift certificate allowed them to purchase a few extra food items in the month they received it. Second, on various occasions, I gave participants rides to facilitate their transportation needs on the interview day that they indicated were helpful to them. Third, numerous participants in this study reported positive experiences with having the opportunity to share their stories and concerns.

The benefits to the social-service community may be greater. The results of this study will contribute to building knowledge about the impact of welfare-to-work policies on the people who experience them. The information could potentially inform both the work of agencies that provide services and supports to people in poverty and the decisions made by policy makers whose responsibilities relate to poverty, welfare-to-work, and the health and well-being of families and children (e.g., income assistance, labour, employment, health, education, childcare, social services). This research thus has the potential to influence policy development in ways that will be beneficial to people in poverty.

Risks of research to participants/community

There were two potential risks to participants in this study. First, there was the possibility that, through telling their stories, participants would discuss issues that were emotionally painful to them, and would be left to deal with the emotional turmoil on their own. In doing the interviews, however, I did not sense that this was a problem for the participants. While they told stories that were difficult for me to hear, I began to learn over time that these stories were part of their daily lives, and that telling me about them was not particularly harmful to them, and seemed, rather, to be cathartic.

The second potential risk was that there was the possibility that participation in this study would raise the participants' expectations for change, and that these expectations would not be met. To minimize this risk, I explained thoroughly to each participant that, while I hoped change would come as a result of this study, the change would be very slow, and that they would not likely benefit from it. I explained that this study had the potential to impact families in poverty in the future, but would probably not benefit them directly, at least in the short-term.

If issues had been identified through the course of the research that required professional intervention, appropriate referrals would have been made. The information sheet and consent form (Appendices B & G) included information about the interviewer's obligation to report evidence of child abuse or neglect and suspicions of abuse by service providers. If such information had been revealed, I would have discussed the issue with the participant prior to reporting, and I would have asked appropriate agency professionals to contact the participant. As it was, no child protection or agency abuse concerns were raised.

Confidentiality

The transcripts developed from the data collection are only identifiable through the use of code numbers and pseudonyms. Any identifying information was deleted from the transcripts. Transcribers did not have access to the consent forms or code lists. Transcripts and notes are stored separately from the consent forms, which will be kept in a locked cabinet at the university for seven years. Any published or printed findings will not contain information that could reveal the identity of the participants. If data are used for another study, approval will be sought from the ethics committee before this occurs. Only members of the Welfare-to-Work Research Team have access to confidential information.

Consent

Consent was obtained from agency directors before any direct contacts were made with agency staff or clients. As I had numerous connections with managers and staff of agencies within the community, I was aware that agencies often prefer to have the study approved by a university ethics committee before recruitment takes place. Ethics approval was thus obtained before agencies were approached.

When I met with participants for the initial interview, I gave them an information sheet about the project that I reviewed orally. I then answered participants' questions, if they had any. As well, consent was explained thoroughly, and written consent was obtained for all three interviews at the beginning of the first interview. In subsequent interviews, the purpose of the project was again explained orally, and verbal consent was obtained before the interview proceeded. *It was explained to each participant at the beginning of each interview that his/her participation was voluntary, and that s/he could withdraw from the study at any time if desired.*

Reflections on ethics

When I began the interviewing process, I felt confident that I would sail through the interviews without difficulty. After all, I had been working with various groups of marginalized people for 15 years, and knew many of the daily challenges faced by disadvantaged persons. I anticipated the kind of stories I might hear, and felt I could manage the often difficult content of the interviews. To my surprise, I experienced a wide range of emotions upon conducting the interviews that I did not anticipate. While I was excited about my research, I was also overwhelmed at times by the stories that I heard, and filled with unease about doing nothing to assist participants with the injustice they experienced daily (Breitkreuz, 2002). When I felt delighted about recruiting a new participant or conducting a "data rich" interview, I felt I had to curtail my enthusiasm because, while I was collecting interesting data, I was also cognizant of the fact that the data were rich with stories of pain and hardship. I began to ask: "does my research really matter?" "What am I doing to improve the quality of this family's life?" Elsewhere, I have surmised that my data collection experience resembled a rollercoaster ride (Breitkreuz, 2002).

My rollercoaster ride resulted primarily from a strong sense of ethical tension, which heightened upon conducting the second set of interviews. While I had embraced the feminist approach to interviewing – to develop meaningful, reciprocal, egalitarian relationships with the participants (Oakley, 1981) – I began to question the ethics of this. Was it right to develop relationships with participants only to end the relationships when my research was completed? How could these relationships be considered egalitarian when they were on my terms? After all, I initiated the interviews and I would terminate them according to my timelines. Was this approach really more ethical, or was it simply utilitarian -- effective for eliciting rich data? Throughout the second round of interviews I recognized that I was developing attachments to some of the participants. I started wondering: "how was this going to end?" As reflected in my field notes:

> One thing I didn't anticipate is that I might become attached to the people I'm interviewing, and that they might become attached to me. How are you supposed to develop trust and rapport without developing a human connection with the people you're interviewing? (January, 2002).

I began to question the ethics of purposefully developing an attachment and then consciously ending the relationship. The process seemed more manipulative than ethical.

To absolve my ethical tension, I found myself imagining that I would "adopt" participants. I envisioned how I would continue relationships with the participants so that I could do something meaningful to impact their lives. For example, I contemplated giving my car to one of the participants whom I was particularly fond of. She needed a car, and I had one that I would be selling as soon as I could afford a better car. I imagined how happy she would be to receive a car as a gift. My car was worthless anyway; while it would be an insignificant financial loss for me to give it away, it would mean so much for her to receive it. I discussed this possibility with my spouse. He asked some practical questions like whether or not she could afford to pay the insurance and registration on the car; and how I felt about giving my car to a marginalized person when it had numerous – albeit relatively minor—mechanical problems. Would she be able to afford the inevitable repairs? In the end, I decided against giving this particular participant my car. But I continued to contemplate it for some time.

In conducting the final set of interviews, I recognized that I had more invested in these interviews than the participants did. While I listened to, reflected upon, and analyzed sixty interviews of detailed accounts of hardship and oppression, they were simply telling their stories to someone who was willing to listen to them. When it came to the final set of interviews, they seemed to recognize that this was the final contact, and that we would then go our separate ways. I began to realize that they had survived before they met me, and that their lives would continue without my interventions. It is likely that they impacted my life much more than I impacted theirs.

However, I remain convinced that it is critical for a qualitative researcher to reflect deeply and uncomfortably about the process in which s/he is asking participants to engage. If a researcher recognizes the depth of the ethical implications of doing his or her research, s/he has a greater likelihood of conducting this research responsibly, sensitively and ethically.

Strengths and Limitations of Methodology and Methods

Earlier, in the methodology section of this chapter, I described why institutional ethnography is particularly suitable for studying the experiences of welfare-to-work participants with pre-school children. I highlighted the importance of using a gender lens in policy analysis, the strength of institutional ethnography in making connections between personal experiences and larger social processes, the importance of identifying the standpoint of disadvantaged persons in doing social research, and the opportunity for social change built into this methodology.

There are also a number of strengths to the methods employed in this study. The greatest strength of interview research is its ability to maintain high internal validity. The term internal validity, also called credibility in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), refers to the extent to which the methods employed in data collection are effective in answering the questions that were meant to be asked in doing the research. Because my study, like other qualitative studies, was focused on collecting data regarding the participants' experiences and perceptions, I was able to maintain a high level of internal validity.

Doing the interviews myself also contributed to the likelihood that interviews were conducted in a consistent manner. In qualitative research, the interviewer is the primary measurement instrument, and so the ability to remain consistent is strengthened when one person conducts all of the data collection and data analysis. Doing this research myself, then, contributed to the reliability, or trustworthiness, of the data.

In addition, because data were collected over the period of one year, the strength of the interviewing process was enhanced. Questions could be asked again in subsequent interviews, and compared to previous data given by the same participant. This was advantageous in three ways. First, it gave me an opportunity to develop deeper relationships with the participants, and thus collect sensitive information that may have previously been concealed. Second, it gave me an opportunity to obtain more complete answers to questions that may have previously elicited thin data. Third, it allowed for the opportunity to see how a participant's perception of his or her experiences might shift, or remain consistent, over time.

There are also limitations inherent in using interviews as the primary research tool. Because the interviewer is the primary research instrument, the quality of the interviewer's skills impacts the quality of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Because this was my first experience conducting research interviews, there were inevitable weaknesses in the data. For example, there were places I noted while reading the transcripts where I could have probed further or asked questions in more effective ways. Because I've had experience conducting many other interviews however (client interviews and employee interviews), I believe this limitation was minimized. The interviews, although not perfect, contained a lot of interesting and useful data.

Researcher effect also plays a part in interview research (Kvale, 1996). The extent to which participants mould their answers to state what they think the interviewer may want to hear is increased. However, because I had the opportunity to build relationships with the participants over time, and meet with them on a number of occasions, I feel this risk was also reduced as much as possible.

The concept of generalizability, the extent to which findings from this study can be applied to the larger population, is complicated within qualitative research. On the one hand, because sample sizes are small and seldom random, arguments are made that the findings are ungeneralizable. On the other hand, the extent to which the findings may be able to enhance understanding of a particular phenomenon or issue is great. Therefore, some would argue that the findings of qualitative research are highly generalizable to persons with similar experiences. This understanding of generalizability is called naturalistic generalizability (Kvale, 1996). In institutional ethnography, the data are grounded in experiences of participants, but the goal is to explicate the social processes which inform those experiences. Therefore, the generalizability of the experiences is not particularly relevant, yet the ability to demonstrate how larger social processes, or extralocal events, help to organize the everyday lives of participants, has applicability beyond the study (Smith, 1987). Given that this study was done in Alberta, however, and given that context is very important to consider within a human ecological framework, it must be noted that the ways in which extralocal events play out in the lives of welfare recipients may look different in other parts of Canada. Consequently, generalization of the findings to other provinces should be done with caution.

In chapters one, two and three, I have set the context for this study by outlining the theoretical framework used for this study, reviewing previous literature, and explaining the methodology and methods employed for this study. In the following chapters, I will document the findings of this research, and delineate their theoretical and policy implications.

Chapter Four

Chronicles of Living on a Low-Income: The Stories Behind the Numbers

...only if, one day, the social worker could come into my life and see how it really is...see what I go through and have to deal with.

Trudy, study participant

The rhetoric of the Government of Alberta claims that Albertans are uniquely privileged Canadians because they are exposed to the Alberta Advantage. According to this discourse, there are several features which create the Alberta Advantage. One element is the exceptionally strong economy enjoyed by Albertans. According to all private sector forecasts, for instance, Alberta ranked 1st or 2nd in GDP growth among all the provinces, and exported almost $55 billion of goods and services to world markets in 2002 (Government of Alberta, 2004b). Other evidence demonstrating the Alberta Advantage is that Alberta was able to balance its budget, not with an increase in taxes, but through government restructuring and reductions in spending. One example of spending cuts is that Alberta downsized its welfare caseload by 73% in less than a decade, from a high of 98,642 cases in December 1992 to 26, 823 in April, 2001 (Gorlick & Brethour, 2002). In other words, the percentage of the population on social assistance in Alberta was reduced from 7.1% to 2.2% (Schafer, Emes & Clemens, 2001). The most recent confirmation of the Alberta Advantage was announced by the Premier of Alberta, The Honourable Ralph Klein, when he declared the province debt-free on July 12, 2004 (Cryderman, 2004b). This was heralded by Mr. Klein as a major achievement of the Klein Conservatives, a legacy of their government (Government of Alberta, 2004a).

Critics of the Klein government, however, have suggested that the Alberta Advantage has come at a great cost to many Albertans, especially those most marginalized (Dacks, Green &Trimble, 1995; Harrison, 2003; Murphy, 1997). The cuts to welfare caseloads become illustrative here. Although caseload reduction has been presented as a positive indication of responsible fiscal policy, it also begs the question: what were its implications for the day-to-day experiences of individuals and families in poverty? Although the statistics about reduced welfare caseloads give some important information, providing a broad sketch of the impacts of welfare reform in Alberta, they leave out essential information needed to understand what has happened to the people most impacted by the policy. The numbers tell us part of the story, but the individual and collective stories behind the numbers go untold.

The purpose of this study was to explore the stories behind the statistical information given by governments (i.e., Government of Alberta Annual Report, 2001/2002). In the next three chapters, I consider the claims of the Alberta Government in relation to the experiences of welfare recipients as they attempt to get a piece of the Alberta Advantage pie. I untangle the web of policy and participant experiences to explicate the relationship between welfare-to-work policies and programs and the experiences of welfare recipients who took part in this study. Specifically, I juxtapose claims from the Alberta government and policy goals from the Supports for Independence (SFI) Program with the experiences of welfare recipients as they attempt to become economically productive, market citizens.

Throughout the next three chapters, I tell the following story, albeit with several contradictory sub-plots. Set with the backdrop of the struggles of reliance on social assistance income (chapter four), welfare-to-work offered study participants a chance to leave a life of poverty – what I refer to as *the promise* (chapter five). This promise was reinforced by the experiences of welfare recipients in employability programs. Generally, these programs were worthwhile to participants, more so for the social interaction, the structure, the sense of purpose, and the student finance income (for those who qualified) they offered than for actually finding work. In short, the participants in this study liked going to school. However, as they began to search for jobs, *the reality* of their future began to set in (chapter six). Here there was more variability in experience than when they were in employability programs. Not surprisingly, participants who did find employment were more likely to perceive employability programs as worthwhile than those who did not, but this was also nuanced by other factors such as the quality of jobs they obtained and the impacts of employment on their day-to-day family needs. Those who found employment which fit with their goals and skills, although satisfied with the employment outcome, also had bittersweet feelings brought about by the fatigue, time limitations and stress they experienced from trying to maintain employment and care for young children.

Those for whom nothing significantly changed throughout the welfare-to-work transition were most likely to be discouraged about employability programs, although they still indicated that they were better off than before they began the programs. For this group, the employability programs offered a glimpse of how things might be and clarity about what they needed to do next. Whether or not "the glimpse" of the future was realistic or not is something I ponder. Overall, for participants who obtained employment and for those who did not, the future was still precarious. This story, in short, is about hope and despair, promise and disappointment, moving forward and moving backward.

A few qualitative studies have documented the difficulties of low-income people as they dually manage on a low-income and navigate welfare reform (see

Cooper Institute, 1999; Edin and Lein, 1996; McMullin et al., 2002; Miranne, 1998). The findings here will contribute to this area of research, further describing the experiences of welfare reform in the day-to-day lives of participants in this study. In this chapter, I start with a primarily descriptive piece, detailing the experiences of participants as they share their accounts of living on social assistance before they began welfare-to-work activities, particularly their experiences with income and food insecurity, stigma and social isolation. I highlight their strategies for managing on a limited income, including the procurement of food for their family, the payment of bills, and the provision of recreation for themselves and their children.

Although the findings in this chapter are predominantly descriptive rather than analytical, it is important that these experiences are documented as they serve as an entry point into understanding the larger social processes as explicated in later sections. In order to examine critically how policy plays out in participants' day-to-day experiences, we first need to have a thorough understanding of their lives. Furthermore, an in-depth understanding of the experiences of participants challenges the popular assumption that living on social assistance is a choice made by individuals who opt for the path of least resistance. As with most things, the simplistic explanation is insufficient.

Participant Characteristics

To begin describing the lives of participants in this study, I have developed a composite biography from my data to highlight common characteristics and issues faced by the participants in my sample. Although the following biography is anecdotal, it depicts the experiences of the vast majority of the participants. It is, in a sense, a "norm" of the experiences as described by participants. To see specific biographies of all the participants in this study, refer to Appendix H.

> *Carmen is 27- years-old with two children, ages 2 and 4. She lives in subsidized public housing and has received social assistance benefits for 18 months. She has a grade 11 education and worked part-time for 6 months as a cook in a restaurant before she resigned to have her second child. Carmen has never been married. She lived common-law with the father of her children, but left him when their second child was about six-months old, because he was physically abusive to her. She does not receive any child maintenance from her former partner and although the government is attempting to garnishee his wages, Carmen doesn't want them to approach him because she fears that he'll blame her. She'd rather not "ripple the waters". That way, he'll offer her money on occasion, and baby sit their children periodically. Carmen's children are generally healthy, although the oldest one was recently diagnosed with asthma, and has a few behavioural problems. Her son has been referred to a psychiatrist for an assessment. Carmen herself has been on medication for depression, and states that she feels anxious quite often. Carmen does not have many material possessions – nothing more than a few secondhand pieces of furniture, dishes and household items collected from Emergency Relief Services. She has an assortment of used clothing given to her by various agencies. She doesn't own a car, nor does she have any savings or promising job prospects. She is chronically short of money, and has to use the food bank every few months, although she doesn't like to do so because it's embarrassing. She has had her phone cut-off twice in the last year for failure to pay her bill. She receives money and food items from her mother once in awhile, but her mother lives alone and doesn't have much excess income to contribute. She'd like to work, but she can't find a job that pays enough to cover her expenses, or one that fits within regular working hours when daycare is available for her children. She indicates that she feels depressed and hopeless about her situation, and worries about the future of her children. Recently, she has been told that she must attend an employability program to continue receiving social assistance benefits.*

As reflected in this aggregate account, the participants in this study, despite their individual differences and unique experiences, had common experiences and challenges as they attempted to survive on social assistance. Like Carmen, all of the participants at the inception of this study were single parents, had pre-school children, had been on social assistance, and experienced ongoing income and food insecurity. Most had worked in the past, but had difficulty sustaining employment due to a combination of factors including poor health, struggles with violent ex-partners, an inability finding jobs that provided a living wage, and childcare needs. Many participants indicated that living in poverty entailed substantial stigma and social isolation.

Table 1 details key demographic information of the 17 participant families in this study. When I first began to interview the participants in May, 2001, they had all been receiving their income from Supports for Independence (SFI) for a minimum of six months, although some had recently commenced student finance funding when I first met with them. All participants were beginning some sort of employment-related activity at the commencement of the study, and all were living below the LICOs. The average age of the participants was 29.6 years, with an age range between 18 and 41. Participants had an average of two children, with a range between one and six. Six participants were Aboriginal, one was Métis, and 10 were Caucasian. The average grade of school achieved was 11, with a range from grade 7 to one year of post-secondary schooling. Nine of the participants lived in subsidized housing, five lived in non-subsidized rental suites, two lived in supportive housing, and one lived in her deceased parent's house.

While I originally attempted to select participants from a variety of family structures in order to obtain a broad range of experiences, my recruitment strategies resulted in locating a sample consisting primarily of lone-mothers. Family-structure changed slightly from the beginning of data collection to its conclusion, however. At the beginning of the study, 16 of the 17 participants I retained throughout the study were lone-mothers, and one was a lone-father. However, through the course of my study, one participant reunited with her previously estranged husband and one participant's boyfriend moved in with her. Thus, at the end of my data collection, I

Table 1. Demographic and Health Information of Participants

Name/w2w number	No of Children	Age	Ethnic origin	Welfare-to-Work Program	Source of Income (1st interview)	Grade of school achieved	Self-Report Health Of Parent	Health of Children (Reported by parent)	Housing
Penny-02	1	41	Caucasian	One-year employability program	Supports for Independence (SFI) Medical	10	Alcoholism (dry eight years), Back problems, depression, food security, asthma, smoker	ADHD, Pre-schizophrenic, turrets	Rented Basement suite
Barbara-04	1	19	Caucasian	Part-time pre-employability program	SFI	9	Stress and mild depression	Good	Subsidized Housing
Trudy-05	4	25	Aboriginal	Part-time pre-employability program	SFI	11	Tired, stressed, anxious, thin, smoker	Youngest child has RSV	Subsidized Housing
Bonnie-06	2	26	Caucasian	Part-time pre-employability program	SFI	12	Celiac, difficult pregnancies Depression, no appetite	Celiac	Subsidized Housing
Karen-07	1	18	Caucasian	(independent) Working	SFI & working	9	Difficult pregnancy, mild depression, exhaustion, chronic stomach pain	Good	Rented Townhouse (with parent)
Natalia-10	4	30	Aboriginal	Six-month employability program	SFI	12 & post-secondary	Addictions, hit by a car (leg and back problems), depression	Youngest (asthma), two oldest ADHD & ODD, turrets	Subsidized Housing
Carrie-13	3	33	Métis	Six-month employability program	SFI	12	Depression, gambling addiction	Kids depression, Hanna – open-heart surgery	Rented townhouse
Danielle-14	1	37	Caucasian	(independent) Looking for work	Inheritance	12	Diagnosed personality disorder (instability of relationships and work), domestic violence	Good	Living in deceased parents' house
Sarah-15	1	40	Caucasian	Six-month employability program	SFI	10	Overweight, bad back, asthma, stress, hit by a car (structural damage)	Extreme Low-iron	Subsidized Housing
Samantha-17	1	31	Caucasian	(independent) Legal-assistant training	(Student Finance Board) SFB	11	Alcoholism , bulimia, depression (medicated), food security	Good	Supportive Housing

Table 1. Demographic and Health Information of Participants, cont.

Shelley–11	1	19	Caucasian	Six-month employability program	SFI	12	Depression, stress, anxiety	Good	Supportive Housing
Melanie – 16	6	34	Caucasian	One-year employability program	SFB	7 (+ some upgrade-ing)	Back problems, low self-esteem, skin condition	Allergies	Rented apartment
Loreen -- 19	2	28	Aboriginal	Six-month employability program	SFI	12 + post-second-ary	Clinical depression (medicated), overweight	Speech impediments, depression	Subsidized Housing
Dana – 20	2	26	Aboriginal	One-year employability program	SFB		Good	Oldest has ODD and autism, Both have speech impediments,	Subsidized Housing
Tamara – 21	2	30	Caucasian	One-year employability program	SFB	12	Panic attacks (medicated for this)	Oldest child has high-need respiratory problems	Subsidized Housing
Mel –22	1	33	Aboriginal	One-year employability program	SFB	12 + post-secondary	Learning disability, depression (medicated), alcoholism	Good	Rented basement suite
Carla-106	3	34	Aboriginal	Independent (looking for work)	Child Tax Benefit	12 + post-second-ary	Good	Good	Subsidized Housing
Average	**2**	**29.6**	**6 Aboriginal** **1 Métis** **10 Caucasian**	**3 Pre-employability program** **5 Six-month program** **5 One-year employability program** **4 Independent**	**9 SFI** **1 SFI & Work** **5 Student Finance** **2 Other**	**Average: grade 11** **Range 7-12+**	**Self-Reported Health problems: 15** **No health problems: 2**	**Reported health problems: 10** **No reported health problems: 7**	**9 Subsidized** **5 Rental** **2 Supportive** **1 Other**

had a sample of 14 lone-mother families, one lone-father family, and two dual-parent families. With a final sample of 82% lone mothers, the family structure of my sample is thus consistent with the population of families on SFI in which 80% of welfare recipients with children in the province of Alberta are single mothers (CCSD, 1998).

Health problems

A significant body of research has established that people in poverty have more health problems than the general population (Humphries & van Doorslaer, 2000; Wilkins, Adams & Brancker, 1989; Mustard, Derksen, Berthelot, Wolfson & Roos, 1997; Wilkins, Adams & Brancker, 1989). Furthermore, previous research has also found that among those in poverty, welfare recipients have poorer health status than working-poor adults (Williamson & Fast, 1998). Using data from the National Population Health survey (NPHS), one recent Canadian study found that welfare recipients without any restricted activity reported higher rates of poor/fair health, depression, distress, poor social support and poor functional health than low-income adults not on social assistance (Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2004). The health status of welfare recipients is documented and considered here because of its potential implications for labour-market attachment. If poor health precludes welfare recipients from secure labour force attachment, as one U.S. study found (Polit et al, 2001), it follows that mandatory welfare-to-work policies will impact welfare recipients' access to financial resources because welfare recipients may be unsuccessful and sustaining employment, yet be at risk for losing income support benefits. It is likely that a lack of financial security and financial resources, in turn, will have negative affects on their health and well-being.

Table 2 details the health problems identified in the course of this study. Consistent with other research examining the health status of welfare recipients (Browne et al., 1997; Lennon, Blome & English, 2002; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2004), the findings of this study show that many participants experienced depressive symptoms. Most participants reported feeling depressed at one time or another (13 of 17), and many had been medicated for this problem. Stress and anxiety were also common health problems (11 of 17) as participants described being worried about their ongoing income and food insecurity. Other mental health related problems reported include panic attacks, personality disorders, eating disorders, learning disabilities, and addictions. Physical health problems included asthma, chronic back pain resulting from injuries, speech problems, difficult pregnancies, chronic stomach pain, uterine infections, weight problems, exhaustion, and multiple lung infections. Two of the participants had been pedestrians hit by cars, creating ongoing structural pain for them.

Table 2. Health Problems Experienced by Participants

Physical Health	Mental Health
Asthma, chronic back pain, insomnia, weight problems (obesity and under-weight), celiac disease, anemia, chronic fatigue, difficult pregnancies, uterine infections, domestic violence, chronic lung infections, chronic stomach pain	Depression, panic attacks, anxiety attacks, stress, alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling addiction, bulimia, personality disorders, learning disabilities

Domestic violence was another issue reported by participants that warrants mention, given its important implications for health. Thirteen of the 17 participants in this study reported a history of domestic violence in past or present relationships.

Although some of this can be attributed to the programs from which I recruited participants (five participants were recruited from an employability program for abused women), there were still another eight participants who identified this issue as a problem they had dealt with in the past, or continued to deal with in the present. Other studies suggest similar results. In their comprehensive review of welfare and domestic violence research, Tolman and Raphael (2000) indicate that findings from numerous studies indicate a strong relationship between welfare receipt and domestic violence where 34% to 65% of women on welfare have experienced domestic violence.

Although none of the participants were currently living with abusive ex-partners, stories recounted from participants suggested significant domestic violence in the past. For instance, when Natalia was hit by a car as a pedestrian the police believed that her extremely abusive ex-partner had done it although this was never proven. Some participants were still dealing with safety issues related to their ex-partner's abuse. Barbara indicated, for instance, that her partner had smashed the picture window of her townhouse. Penny had call display and was very careful about answering the phone due to fear related to past abuse. Shelley felt she had no choice but to leave the province because her ex-spouse continued to harass her. Some participants indicated that they were still addressing the emotional repercussions of their abuse. For example, Loreen, who had experienced extreme physical abuse, was still dealing with the consequences of the abuse, which created significant depression and anxiety for her.

Although domestic violence in itself may not be an individual health problem per se, it is included here because there is strong evidence linking domestic violence to physical and mental health problems (Tolman & Raphael, 2000). Women who have been abused report higher rates of emotional problems, hospitalizations, and substance-use problems. Tolman and Rosen (2001), for instance, found that the women who had experienced domestic violence were almost two times more likely than their non-abused counterparts to have one or more of five psychiatric disorders measured including major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol dependence, and drug dependence. Because women on welfare are more likely to have a history of domestic violence, and because domestic violence is correlated with health problems, domestic violence is an important consideration when looking at welfare recipients' health.

As one of the health problems associated with domestic violence, it is interesting to note that one-third of the participants identified addictions as a significant problem that they had struggled with in their lives. Addictions included alcoholism (4), drug addictions (1), and gambling addictions (1). Importantly, all participants who identified addictions' problems also identified a history of domestic violence in their lives. Although only one participant was still using, other participants identified the energy and commitment needed to sustain a sober status. Samantha explained how she had to make a choice between dealing with her addiction and addressing her finances.

> But I dealt with that [addiction] for a long time …so I have been on and off the system for years. Because I just, I would go on it [social assistance] and, and try to take the time to, you know, to take care of myself and my life and then I wouldn't have the means, you know, my financial. They wouldn't cover my expenses – ever -- so I would always end up going back to work and being stuck in that same spot of, you know, not being able to -- to sort of ignoring my emotional state of mind and, um, concentrating on the financial means. And, and so that went on and off for, for a long time (w2w017).

Attending Alcoholics Anonymous gatherings and meeting with sponsors took time and energy that was difficult to find. Increased stress, anxiety, or depression heightened the desire to retreat to the addiction to cope with ongoing stressors. During a particularly difficult time Loreen told me that although she was tempted to start drinking again, she resisted the temptation for her children. She explained: "I'm wanting them to have a stable place, a stable home life, and not having them seeing me that way" (w2w019-02).

In sum, participants experienced considerable physical and mental health problems, which may have had consequences for their ability to sustain employment in the labour-market. Furthermore, participants reported that their children also experienced significant health problems which will be examined next.

Health problems of children

Previous studies have found that low-income children have a disproportionate number of chronic health problems when compared to middle-income children (Lipman, Offord, & Boyle, 1996; Ross, Scott & Kelly, 1996). In this study, participants identified fewer health problems in their children than in themselves, but the problems identified were considerable, and in some cases, severe. Six out of the 17 participants indicated that their children were generally healthy, with the exception of the odd cold or flu. As detailed in Table 3, eleven participants identified health problems ranging from allergies, low-iron, chronic ear infections, and frequent bouts of sickness to problems as severe as asthma, pre-schizophrenic symptoms, tourette's disorder, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiance disorder (ODD), obsessive-compulsive disorder, speech impediments, learning disabilities, depression, bi-polar disorder, pervasive development disorder (PDD), anxiety, heart problems, and pre-signs of cystic fibrosis.

Table 3. Health problems experienced by children

Allergies
Asthma and Other Respiratory Conditions
Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
Anxiety
Bi-polar disorder
Depression
Ear infections
Frequent illnesses (colds, infections)
Heart Condition
Learning Disabilities
Low-iron
Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD)
Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD)
Pre-symptoms of cystic fibrosis
Speech Impediments
Tourette's disorder
Schizophrenic Risk Factors

The time and energy needed to address physical and emotional health problems in children was extensive. Children with serious health problems posed challenges on a number of fronts. For parents of children with behavioural problems, childcare could be difficult to secure (w2w002). Holding a job became particularly challenging as children with significant problems had to go to specialists for various appointments (w2w013; w2w020; w2w021). Long bus rides coupled with sitting in waiting rooms and seeing specialists took a lot of time. One appointment could tie-up much of the day. Participants reported that the time required to address health concerns of their children interfered with their ability to sustain employment. Other research shows similar findings, indicating that more low-income women who were not currently working reported difficulty finding work due to their children's health compared with employed low-income women, (Heymann & Earle, 1999; Romero et al., 2002).

Discussion of health problems

Because health problems may preclude welfare recipients from securing employment, it is important that they be considered in any policy discussions about moving welfare recipients from welfare to work. In examining SFI policies regarding the health status of welfare recipients, it is clear that they include exemptions from employment for people with health problems. Welfare recipients may qualify for a short-term medical leave if their health condition is expected to last less than three months, or a temporary medical leave if the health problem or disability is anticipated to preclude employment for 3 to 12 months. Temporary employment exemptions must to supported by medical evidence which indicate how long the medical problem will likely last (AFSS, 1993, SFI-02-02-03, category 31). This category includes pregnant women in their third trimester of pregnancy and clients attending full-time addictions programs. Clients assessed as "suffering from persistent mental or physical health problems" which preclude them from "full-time/continuous employment in the regular labour market" are not required to engage in employment-related activities unless their circumstances change (AFSS, 1993, 02-02-03, category 42). Furthermore, parents are given temporary exemptions from work requirements if they are experiencing "unusual difficulty" in managing multiple work and family demands (SFI 02-03, p. 3).

The work exemptions related to health concerns in the SFI policies as stated above appear comprehensive and adequate in addressing a broad spectrum of health problems. Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that individual SFI workers and doctors recognized and addressed participant's health problems through recommending short-term medical leaves to participants. A number of participants indicated that they had been on short-term medical leave one or more

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times for stress, depression, anxiety and other health problems. Yet, despite the policy statements as indicated above, and the discretion used by individual social workers and doctors in granting medical exemptions of one sort or another, the health problems indicated by participants in this study, especially problems with depression, anxiety, and other related mental health problems, suggest that these exemptions may miss inconspicuous but critical health problems which may preclude participants from securing and/or sustaining employment. Furthermore, the policies do not adequately address how the health problems of children may impact a parent's ability to be employed. Although provisions exist in the policy to temporarily exempt parents from work requirements for family care, parents in this study with children with multiple health problems did not quality for work exemptions. Thus, the findings here suggest that what determines good or poor health, or difficulty in coping with work/family balance, may be more complex than is identified in SFI policies.

In the next section, I document the key experiences participants' shared as they recounted their lives on social assistance, including income and food insecurity, stigma and social isolation. I suggest that the conditions in which welfare recipients lived, particularly income and food insecurity, may have exacerbated preexisting health problems.

"Welfare Sucks": Experiences of Living on Social Assistance

Contemporary feminist analysis acknowledges the oftentimes complex and contradictory nature of women's relationship to the state, recognizing that the welfare state offers independence and equality to women while concomitantly marginalizing them (O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999). Evidence of this contradiction existed in responses from participants in this study. Although a few participants acknowledged their gratitude for the financial support offered through social assistance, most participants shared negative experiences about their lives on welfare. Most participants indicated that the system was impersonal and controlling, and numerous participants indicated that they had never met their workers. Barbara's response to a question about what it was like to be on welfare was: "they just control you and they want to know every little thing about you" (w2w004-03). She felt the system was controlling because it penalized welfare recipients for not submitting client cards or pay stubs through holding their cheques. She, like others, also indicated that it could take days before her worker would return a phone call. Danielle, a 37 year-old-woman who had only had a few short spells of welfare use in her lifetime stated: "Um, well its hard to be told what to do when you're 37 years old, that you can't do this, and you have to do that, you know.... and then every time, if I have to go back again, it's like, you know, let's hope it's only temporary. They'll think, you know, I've failed, what's wrong with me?" (w2w0w14). Melanie summed-up her feelings about how she felt the workers viewed her: "they just treat you like a dog, they don't care about you, you know, they just look at you, oh, another welfare bum" (w2w016). Some participants summarized their impression on welfare with the terse but unambiguous term, "welfare sucks". Samantha captured this sentiment:

> Like I don't ever want to be on welfare again, it sucks, it really sucks. And I guess that's positive for them. They make it so, you know, there are people like me who just say okay, I'm never, ever going to go [on it again], you know what I mean? And there's people that just work their ass off to get off it, to stay off it.... (W2w017).

Included in the experiences of hardship on welfare were income and food insecurity, stigma and social isolation. These experiences will be explored in-depth below.

Income and food insecurity

Participants reported experiencing ongoing income insecurity while on social assistance, which, in turn led to food insecurity. Given the social- assistance rates in Alberta, reports of persistent income insecurity were not surprising. As outlined in Table 4, the social assistance allowance in Alberta in 2001 for a single parent with one child was $723 per month ($8681 per year). This amount was supplemented by the National Child Benefit of $197 per month ($2358 per year), and two by-annual Goods and Services Tax (GST) rebates (totaling $520 per year) for a total monthly income of $963, or an annual income of $11, 559 (National Council of Welfare, 2002).

Although not an official poverty line, the Low-Income Cut-Offs (LICOs) have commonly been used to measure poverty rates in Canada. The LICOs are determined by calculating the average percentage of income spent by Canadian families on food, clothing and shelter, and then adding 20%. On average, Canadian families spend 35% of their income on food, clothing and shelter. Thus, when a family spends 55% or more of their income on food, clothing, and shelter, they are living below the LICOs (Statistics Canada, 2004a). In other words, if a family spends 20% more on basic needs than the average Canadian family, it is below the LICOs. Among other reasons, the LICOs have been criticized because of their relative measure, and because they do not adequately consider regional or population differences in the country (Sarlo, 2003).

To address some of the shortcomings of the LICOs, the Market Basket Measure (MBM), a new yardstick to measure poverty, was developed by Human Resources Development Canada. This measure, unlike the LICOs, is used to determine the cost of basic needs including food, shelter, clothing, transportation and other items such as a telephone in various regions of the country. To standardize this measure, the MBM uses a "reference family" -- a family of four, two adults and two children – to show the differing costs of necessary items in the basket according to regions of the country (HRDC, 2003). According to the MBM, the minimum annual income required to meet basic needs for a family of four in Edmonton in 2000 was $23, 571 (National Council of Welfare, 2004).

Table 4 summarizes the differences in SFI rates, the MBM, and the LICOs, showing that whether the LICOs or the MBM are used, SFI rates do not adequately meet the basic needs of welfare recipients. It must be noted that in Table 4, the MBM is based on figures from 2000, as figures for 2001 were not available. Presumably, the 2001 figures would be slightly higher to reflect increases in the cost of living. Yet, despite this slippage in the numbers, the SFI incomes fell well below the MBM. On average, SFI incomes, even with additional income from the Child Tax Benefit and GST rebates, were about 30% lower than the MBM, and 37 to 38% below the LICOS (National Council of Welfare, 2004). Consequently, participants in this study, like other welfare recipients, experienced income and food insecurity which required them to employ various strategies to get through each month.

To address the difficult realities of income insecurity while living on social assistance, participants needed to make difficult choices in order to make ends meet. This reality is described by Loreen in the following passage:

> I tend to be very, um, I guess with the amount of money that I get, I can't afford to waste anything. And I know how hard it is for me to ask for help, so I always make sure that there always has to be so much in the bank for… Like I don't buy anything that's, um, like my son loves his little snacks. And that's what we got from the food bank. He loves these little granola bar things, um, dips they're called or something, we get from the food bank. Like I don't, I can't afford to buy stuff like that. We have to live very, very sparingly I guess you could say. Um, the one thing that I guess I go a bit crazy on is like the fruit, right. Like it's just I, we don't have any fancy meals. Like every

> once in a while I take them .... to McDonald's, you know, that's their treat. And I usually take them to the dollar store, which is like pretty cheap and I tell them, you know, take one. We just have to live very cheaply, basically (w2w019).

As Loreen indicated, extras for lunches and outings to fast-food restaurants were exceptional, not typical. Activities that are taken for granted by many middle-class families were not assumed in the lives of the participants. Loreen described how her seven-year-old son lost his tooth and Loreen had to tell him that the tooth fairy could not come right now because she did not have any money. He then lost a second, and then a third tooth, and he still had to wait, because she could not afford the spare dollar to put under his pillow. She explained how she would have to start putting some money aside so that she could pay him for his teeth. This kind of poverty is unimaginable to many people in Canada where the average family income is over $61,000 (StatisticsCanada, May 26, 2004), but it is the kind of reality that people live daily on a social-assistance income.

Table 4. Annual SFI Rates and Low-income Measures, 2001

	SFI Income	Child Tax Benefit	GST Benefit	Total from Columns 1, 2, 3	LICOs, (After Tax)	MBM, 2000
Two parents, two children	13, 030	4,342	628	18,000	26,486	23,571
Single parent, one child	8,681	2,358	520	11,559	18,540	16,929*

Source: HRDC, 2003; National Council of Welfare, 2002; Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2004a

* The MBM was calculated by HRDC across Canada only for a family of four in the year 2000. Figures for 2001 are not available. The figure given here was calculated for 2001 by the National Council of Welfare (NCW, 2004).

Participants gave rich descriptions of survival strategies that they used to address food and income insecurity. They discussed a broad range of strategies to survive the month including smart shopping, purchasing particular kinds of affordable food, self deprivation, creative bill paying, reliance on friends and family for food and social support, program participation in community groups and food co-ops, engaging in rent-to-own deals, using pawn shops, declaring bankruptcy, and withholding information from SFI workers. A combination of these strategies was usually employed in order to obtain enough food and resources for the month. The methods employed to address income and food insecurity are described in greater detail below.

Buying and eating food

Smart shopping combined with modest eating were critical strategies for getting through the month. Smart shopping included shopping in a variety of stores to get the best prices, using coupons, and shopping on specified days when prices in grocery stores were reduced. To decrease transportation costs, many participants used public transportation to go to the grocery store, utilizing a taxi service for the return trip with a load of groceries. For example, Barbara, a 19-year-old mother with one son, explained her shopping strategy. She shopped at Super Store because the prices were better, and bought meat at the end of the day at another grocery chain, when the price was reduced to clear out the day's meat stock. She did not buy junk food as she knew it was expensive, and she used substantial amounts of macaroni and rice to make casseroles for herself and her son. Another mom, Penny, shopped on "cheap Tuesday" (a day allocated monthly by some major grocery chains when the cost of groceries was reduced by 10 to 15%) in order to save 10% on all food purchases. She took the bus to the store, and caught a taxi back home with her groceries, which cost her $5.

Many of the participants described how they accomplished the goal of staying within their food budget. The most common strategy was to buy limited amounts of fruit and meat, although many tried to ensure their children consumed at least some of these food types. Fruit purchased was usually the inexpensive varieties such as bananas and apples. Most participants limited meat purchases as well, and the meat they bought was usually hamburger or tuna. Going without particular foods, most commonly fruit or meat, the last two weeks of the month, was also a common strategy employed to afford enough food. These findings are consistent with Canadian research which has found that people living in poverty are less likely to eat nutrient-rich food (Health Canada, 2002; Rainville & Brink, 2001). Specifically, households typifying extreme food insecurity reported substantially less intake of fruit, vegetables and meat than households with food security (Tarasuk, 2004).

Previous research has found that low-income people are more likely to skip meals or reduce the quality of their food when food insecure (Hamelin, Beaudry & Habicht, 2002; Health Canada, 2002). However, these findings are nuanced by the allocation of food within households that are characterized by food insecurity. Food distribution is uneven within households in times of severe food shortages (Hamelin, Beaudry & Habicht, 2002; McIntyre et al., 2002) where mothers sacrifice their own food intake to ensure that their children eat (Cook, 2000; McIntyre, Glanville, Raine, Dayle, Anderson & Battaglia, 2003). The findings in my study also give evidence that parents compromised their own nutritional needs, both in terms of quantity and quality of food, in order to improve their children's dietary intake. One participant, Penny, captured this sentiment:

> Um, you know, so the thing of it is, you, the food issue, you can only buy so much because you only have so much. You've still got to pay your rent, your bills… I don't put myself first, I put my son first because you pretty well have to -- kids come first (w2w002).

Melanie explained that because of a limited income, she "starved" herself to ensure that her daughter ate properly. When I asked her to clarify what she meant by starved, she explained that she did not eat regular meals. Rather, she maintained a liquid diet throughout the day, drinking coffee for breakfast and milk for lunch, and only consumed solid food at dinnertime. Conversely, her daughter ate three meals per day plus snacks (w2w016). Through denying herself food throughout the day, Melanie ensured that her daughter was able to eat more. Similarly, Trudy reflected back to a time when she was particularly food insecure where she compromised her own nutritional needs to feed her children.

> There are times way back when it was so sad. I would break down crying 'cause I had no food, no milk, no pampers. I had no choice but to turn to my ex in-laws you know. They'd help out a little bit but only just for my little ones….Back then I was so skinny, I'd lost so much weight. I'd have to give my food to my kids just to feed them. They'd be so hungry. I know how to manage on water (w2w005-03).

More common than reducing food consumption, mothers would deprive themselves of certain foods to ensure that their children had sufficient nutrition. This self-deprivation was described by Loreen:

> Mostly the only protein that we get is like the tuna. I'm so grateful my kids love tuna now. They wouldn't touch it in the beginning… Sometimes the kids get so tired of having the same things over and over again. And we only have enough, I only have enough made for sometimes just three people, right. So, I, so I give them that and I, sometimes I just survive on bread, which is not very good. But that's what I do… It's not very good for my weight, but … (w2w019-03).

In talking further with Loreen, I had the sense that she had excellent knowledge of nutritional requirements. Although she knew that bread was not her best choice, she made a deliberate decision to eat a lot of bread in order to save the more nutrient-rich food for her children. She, like others, made difficult choices in order to maximize the dollars available for food.

Despite their best efforts to put children first, the health of children was sometimes put at risk due to budgetary limitations. Barbara, for instance, explained why she stopped feeding her son formula three months before the recommended age:

> I just pay for my, actually I pay for my lights, and my cable, and my phone and that -- I don't know how much that ends up being. And then I have enough [money] for diapers. At first I didn't have enough because my son was on formula, and because I couldn't afford formula I took him off at a very young age. He was off [formula] at six months, and he was on whole milk. [Now] he's on 2% because $18 a week I couldn't afford for formula --like it's too much (w2w004).

In addition to being unable to offer children developmentally appropriate food, finances were sometimes so limited that the food supply was completely diminished. Loreen described how she lacked food for her children until she forced herself to go to a food bank.

> I guess I have too much pride or whatever and I hated having to ask for help, you know, handouts. It was like "I can do this on my own". Until I finally let it sink in my head that the kids were hungry and that I had to do this. I went to the food bank a couple of weeks ago because I had no food for my son's lunch. And it's just, it's crazy, I didn't even have any money for the fruit that we usually get (w2w019).

Agency support, particularly from small community groups such as drop-in centres, parent groups and food co-ops, was commonly accessed by participants to procure needed food. For instance, Barbara described in detail how she provided lunch for herself and her son each week. On Mondays and Fridays she and her son ate at a community centre which served soup and bannock. On Thursday they ate lunch at a women's community centre. Tuesdays and Wednesdays she either packed lunch, or had lunch provided by her son's Grandmother (w2w004).

Participating in food co-ops to obtain inexpensive bread and other meals was another frequently reported strategy for procuring food. Through involving themselves in programs like co-ops, limited funds for groceries could be stretched further. Natalia, for example, went to a community kitchen where she contributed a few dollars, prepared meals with other women, and then took the meals home to her family (w2w010). Loreen was involved in a bread depot where she paid one dollar a month and got bread three days a week (w2w019-03).

It is important to note that in Canadian households, insufficient income is the strongest predictor of food insecurity (Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003). The food insecurity evident in the stories above are thus concrete manifestations of the shortage of financial resources experienced by participants. In other words, "[m]easures of household food insecurity are essentially measures of…acute financial insecurity. In this sense, food insecurity denotes a more extreme level of material deprivation" (Tarasuk, 2004, p. 196). In order to effectively eradicate food insecurity, then, income insecurity must be addressed; however, as these participants' experiences show, social assistance rates were not meeting the mark.

Creative bill paying: "Pay the rent or feed the kids"[3]

Chronic income insecurity necessitated that the procurement of food had to be balanced with paying the rent and utility bills. Participants thus employed creative strategies to pay bills which would allow them to subsist month to month, albeit marginally. The majority of the participants indicated that they paid the rent first, and then strategized about how to pay other bills. There were several methods employed to pay utility bills. First, participants indicated that paying the bill that "screamed the loudest" was a reasonably effective approach to preventing utility cut-offs. That is, if a particular company indicated that they were going to cut-off a utility for failure to pay, they would pay that bill first. Second, paying bills alternately helped to prevent losing the utilities. This strategy involved, for instance, paying the gas bill one month, and then the power bill the alternate month. A third approach commonly used was to not pay bills in full each month, but to pay just enough on each bill to avoid getting cut-off. Participants tended to employ a variety of these strategies at different times, using pragmatism to ensure that their utilities would continue. This finding is consistent with other qualitative research which found that juggling bills was a survival strategy employed by welfare recipients to stretch limited income (Monroe & Tiller, 2001).

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[3] This phrase is taken from Hurtig (2000).

Despite these strategies, most participants would inevitably have their phone cut-off at some point, because this was the lowest-priority utility bill. During the course of my study, well over half of the participants lost their phone numbers. The fact that so many participants lost their phone numbers underscores the instability and constant pressure that they experienced day-to-day. Many participants described the reality of "not in service" as a regular occurrence in their lives -- one telling point about their chronic lack of funds and need to make choices about which bills to pay first.

Reliance on others: Social support

Similar to earlier studies examining the experiences of low-income women on social assistance (Edin & Lein, 1996; Miranne, 1998; Monroe & Tiller, 2001), I found that participants often relied on family members, including parents, siblings, ex-spouses, and other relatives, to provide needed assistance. One approach was to live with family members for emotional, practical and financial support. For example, Karen, an 18-year-old mother with a one-year-old son, lived with her mother who gave her assistance in a variety of ways. Karen's mother paid the rent for their townhouse, and provided evening childcare while Karen was at work. Similarly, Mel, a father with a three-year-old daughter, lived with his father and two cousins in order to make ends meet. The four of them shared the rent, and Mel's dad provided transportation to Mel as he owned a vehicle. Samantha would have her mother come from another province to stay with her for weeks or months at a time. This was bitter-sweet. On the one hand, her mother provided her with support doing needed chores and childcare; on the other hand, living in a small two-bedroom apartment with her mother for extended periods of time was difficult because she lacked her own personal space.

Participants also described how ex-spouses, parents, siblings, cousins and other relatives provided necessary practical, emotional and sometimes financial support in difficult times. For some participants, parents provided food and sometimes small gifts of money (w2w004; w2w007; w2w017; w2w021; w2w022). In addition, a number participants had the support of siblings, especially sisters, who provided occasional childcare and emotional support (w2w005; w2w006; w2w011; w2w017; w2w021; w2w106). Unlike the findings of Monroe and Tiller (2001) whose participants reported that the fathers' of their children were generally unhelpful, several participants in this study reported assistance from ex-spouses in the form of modest amounts of financial support and childcare (w2w010; w2w013; w2w014; w2w015; w2w020; w2w021; w2w022). For a number of participants this was a difficult relationship due to a history of abuse. The fact that these participants continued this relationship despite the element of risk involved underscored their need for support from their ex-spouse, however volatile, especially with childcare.

Other survival strategies

Other survival strategies mentioned by some of the participants included a variety of efforts to obtain goods and services. Some purchased rent-to-own appliances such as beds, televisions, and washers and dryers. Still others pawned items in order to get money to make ends meet. One participant, Samantha, collected both Employment Insurance and SFI simultaneously for awhile in order to catch-up on bills, even though she was aware that this was illegal. Others lived with friends and relatives without informing social assistance personnel in order to save money. Despite their best and creative efforts to keep the bill collectors at bay, several participants inevitably acquired too much debt to manage and declared bankruptcy. The debt load they carried was relatively small (the largest in my study was $13,000), but with no end in sight some felt that they had no choice but to declare bankruptcy and start over.

In summary, participants, in recounting their experiences of living on social assistance, shared stories of hardship and struggle, which some encapsulated with the phrase, "welfare sucks". The significant income and food insecurity experienced by participants necessitated that they employ creative survival strategies in order to make ends meet. In addition to the practical consequences of income and food insecurity, there were psycho-social impacts. In the next section, I discuss two key corollaries of living in poverty -- stigma and social isolation.

Stigma

Participants described the humiliation involved with being on social assistance, including the degradation involved in asking for goods and services required to fulfill basic needs, and the implied failure of the welfare recipient for relying on social assistance. Comments from several participants illustrate this sentiment. Natalia, for instance, commented on the denigration involved in asking for assistance with basic needs, stating: "I feel like I really have to belittle myself in order to get anything from anybody (w2w010-02). Dana had similar thoughts: It's very, it's all, it's a very embarrassing thing to have to apply for social services, and it shouldn't be because that money is there for the people to use it and you shouldn't be made to feel like you're nothing. And that's how it is" (w2w020).

Danielle described the disparagement she experienced while living on social assistance: "…its, you know, like its very degrading. You're stuck to a certain amount of money, and to not be able to find a job, and you have to take a bus everywhere and I really, you know… (w2w014). She also commented on the experience of not having enough money for things, stating succinctly that "it's embarrassing when you can't pay" (w2w014-03). Sarah indicated that the stigma attached to being poor was already evident to her toddler: "But holy shit, you know…she's [her daughter] not even two years old yet, and she already knows what it's like to be in poverty almost" (w2w015).

Goffman (1963) posits that stigmatized persons hold the status of either discredited or discreditable. Discredited persons cannot conceal the source of their stigma whereas discreditable persons can. Rogers-Dillon (1995) argues that welfare recipients are not discredited, but rather discreditable, because welfare receipt is not a visible attribute. Their ability to circumvent stigma is therefore dependent upon keeping their stigma status discreditable rather than discredited. To maintain the status of discreditable therefore requires the ability to conceal poverty. In my study, one participant, Samantha, gave a particularly poignant description of how she attempted to conceal her poverty from others through her clothing which merits further discussion.

To achieve a look which would conceal her poverty status, Samantha spent available time bargain shopping at trendy clothing stores to search for good sales. She eschewed second-hand items as much as possible. To finance this, she worked as a waitress every second Saturday in a higher-end restaurant in addition to attending her full-time job retraining program to become a legal secretary. She would also utilize the food bank when required and shop wholesale when she could get a ride to the store. Her motto was "you attract where you're at" and so in order for her to not "attract" poverty, she would look as middle-class as she could. She described her rationale for this:

> Because if I had to live with second hand stuff all around me, I would feel like a second hand person, do you know what I mean? Like if everything I had was used, or given to me, or, you know, because I could not afford to buy my own, how is that going to make me feel like a self-sufficient human being? It's not... (w2w017).

Samantha's approach, to conceal her poverty from others through looking mainstream, points to particular objects, situations, or places associated with poverty that participants strived to avoid.

Goffman (1963) coined the term "stigma symbols" to refer to "signs which are especially effective in drawing attention to a debasing identity" (p. 43). Stigma symbols can make visible attributes which might otherwise be invisible, thereby changing the status of a discreditable person to that of the discredited. One obvious example of using stigma symbols to discredit persons is the historical practice in some societies of burning symbols into the skin of individuals to make visible their wrongdoing. Inversely, status symbols, such as clothing in Samantha's view, could be used to elevate the status of a person.

In her qualitative study of the stigma experienced by welfare recipients, Rogers-Dillon (1995) used a symbolic-interactionalist framework to show that food stamps were stigma symbols for participants. Similarly, Reid (2004) found that food banks, food vouchers, and other identifiers of poverty shamed the participants in her study. Like the findings of these two studies, I found that food, clothing and shelter – in other words, basic needs – served as significant factors which defined the stigma status of individuals. Some participants, for instance, intentionally lived in non-subsidized housing, and had no desire to move to subsidized units due to the stigma attached to living in subsidized housing. Conversely, several participants who lived in subsidized housing wanted to leave it, because of the stigma they associated with it. In addition to Samantha, other participants recognized that clothing was an indicator of one's poverty. In discussing her inability to purchase new clothes, Carrie, for example, stated that her clothes, like many of the participants of her employability program, were old, stained, ripped, and worn-out which could negatively impact the chance of obtaining employment (w2w013). Most significant for participants was the stigma attached to food insecurity. Food vouchers in once instance, and food banks in other cases, were identified as stigma symbols by participants in this study.

Hamelin, Beaudry and Habicht (2002) found that participants in food insecure households felt shame and embarrassment about their situation and tried to conceal food insecurity from others, sometimes even family members. I had similar findings. Food insecurity was clearly a blatant manifestation of poverty, and was made visible through the use of food vouchers and food banks. Carrie recounted a story in which her use of a food voucher became very public. Unlike most welfare recipients, Carrie was issued food vouchers instead of cash because she had a gambling addiction. Usually she was issued the food voucher at the end of the month for the following month. On one occasion she went to Superstore instead of Safeway, where she normally shopped. She was issued a $300 food voucher for November, but received it at the end of October. As soon as she received the cheque, she went and bought $300 worth the groceries (at Superstore she was required to use the whole voucher at once as they would not give any cash back). After $307 worth of groceries had gone through the till, she presented the voucher to the clerk, who refused it because it was not yet November 1st. Carrie recalled that everyone in the store was looking at her, and that she was embarrassed as she waited and waited for them to call social services to obtain approval to accept the voucher (w2w013). For Carrie, the food voucher was a stigma symbol that became known to other customers in the grocery store.

The food bank also served as a stigma symbol for participants. Most of the participants only used the food bank when absolutely necessary, and many of them tried to limit going there as much as possible. Similar to participants in Hamelin et al.'s (2003) study, participants in my study recounted the experience of going to the food bank as humiliating. This feeling was further accentuated by the fact that food obtained from food banks was often stale and unappealing. Barbara commented: "I don't like food bank food because it's either expired or they have the, the fruits and vegetables that are, and I don't want to feed my son that" (w2w004). Barbara's comment resonates with findings from Teron and Tarasuk's (1999) study on the quality and quantity of food distributed at food banks. In this study, Teron and Tarasuk found that close to 80% of the hampers they examined contained at least one outdated or damaged food item, and over half of their study participants had received food bank food at some point which they believed was unsafe to eat.

If participants needed to obtain free food, they were more likely to access food from other community resources such as drop-in community centres, where they felt less stigma in gathering the food. Penny, for instance, would never go to a food bank, but unreservedly accepted food and other necessary items from the head start program where her son was enrolled (w2w002). Food banks, in short, highlighted participants' poverty status and were therefore avoided when possible. Participants thus had a complex relationship with food banks; while they disliked using them because of the stigma associated with doing so, they also needed to use them at times in order to procure enough food for their families.

On one occasion, I had the opportunity to go to a food bank with a participant. I arranged to meet Natalia at the food bank so that I could drive her home with her food, and then do an interview with her. Going to the food bank was an eye-opening experience. I arrived before Natalia because she had missed her bus getting there. The food bank staff asked if I was Natalia's worker, and I replied that I was a friend giving her a ride home. From that point forward, I felt that I was placed into a category in which the staff could separate themselves from me. It seemed like the staff had a need to categorize people into "haves" and "have-nots". Because I chose to conceal my status, I was downgraded into the category of "have-nots" and treated accordingly.

To determine her eligibility for food, Natalia was interviewed by a staff member at the food bank in a private office. While she was in the interview room I babysat her children. On a couple of occasions during our wait, the children had to use the washroom. Each time we went to the washroom we were escorted to and from the room. I felt like a second-class citizen just from that experience alone. Standing at the reception counter, waiting for Natalia, I was asked to sit down. Again, I felt like a second-class citizen. Natalia came out of the interview room disgruntled. The food bank personnel would only give her food for two of her four children because she had only brought identification for two of her children with her. I thought this was ridiculous because they knew she had four children as she had used the food bank before and they likely had computerized records.

As we were leaving, Natalia commented that the janitor was the only nice person there. I shared her perspective. The janitor was an emaciated man with a noticeable blood spot in his eye. He made small talk with us, played with the children, and treated us with dignity and respect. The lack of friendliness displayed by the other staff members compared to this man was somehow subtle and blatant at the same time. The janitor was friendly, outgoing, gregarious. The others were guarded and quiet. I found myself wondering which camp I fit into (Field Notes, w2w010-03).

Rogers-Dillon (1995) points out that the term "welfare mother" is often juxtaposed with "tax-paying citizen", "suggesting that women who receive welfare have a distinct and degraded social position" (p. 442). She cites Simmel (1971, p. 172) who posits that "assistance...makes the poor person into an object of the activity of the group and places him at a distance from the whole, which at times makes him live as a corpus vile by the mercy of the whole and at times because of this, makes him into a bitter enemy" (As cited in Rogers-Dillon, p. 441). At the food bank, I experienced the objectification experienced by welfare recipients, enhancing my understanding of poverty at an experiential level. Being treated as a "second-hand" person was degrading. This experience created conflicting thoughts for me.

Although I did not want the staff there to know who I was, first because it was not necessary, and second because I wanted to get a sense of how Natalia would be treated, I also found myself wanting the staff to know that I wasn't part of the group they so obviously disdained. I was appalled with myself for thinking this. My conflicting thoughts further underscored for me how charity creates a social separation between the giver and the receiver, where the receiver is stigmatized with his or her knowledge of being lower down in the social hierarchy.

Stigma is a relational concept; a person only experiences stigma in relation to others. In examining stigma, Syme (1986) found that once a person passes the threshold of poverty, his or her increased position in the hierarchy is more important than the increase in material conditions. In other words, where a person fits in relation to others in the social order of human society also matters. This suggests that to understand the full implications of poverty, researchers must consider more than simply a lack of material resources. According to this approach, the impacts of ongoing degradation by individuals and groups for being "less than" in some way must be considered. The findings on stigma from this study lend some credence to Syme's thesis. Participants suffered, not only from a lack of financial resources, but from how they saw themselves in relation to others. Yet, it is important to recognize that although poverty may be more complex than material deprivation, financial resources provide a segue into obtaining access to social needs. In other words, money provides opportunities to purchase goods and services which can elevate one's status in the social hierarchy. Conversely, a lack of economic resources often leads to exclusion from mainstream society, causing stigma, and leading to social isolation.

Social isolation

The stigma of being poor was intricately tied with the social isolation that occurred as a result of living on a low income. Natalia described how being at home with her children while on social assistance was a negative experience. "It's just because I was with my kids, that's all I had was my kids, nothing to do with them, nothing to give them, nothing to show them, you know... "(w2w010-03). In her study of the experiences of single mothers on social assistance within neo-liberalist society, Power (2002) argues that one of the key ways that welfare mothers were "othered" was through their identity as "flawed consumers". Citing Bauman (1998), she posits that we have shifted from a producer society in which we are valued by what we produce, to a consumer society in which we are judged according to what we have. In consumer society we are "now less influenced by our identity as workers than by the identity we create for ourselves (for those who can afford it) through our "lifestyle," or what we consume" (Power, p. 192). Natalia's comment above, similar to other participants, suggests that she saw her failure in her inability to provide material goods and activities for her children.

Central to the experience of social isolation was limited opportunity to engage in recreational activities. Many participants described watching television as their main recreation, because they needed to do things that did not cost money. Carrie described this:

P: Its really, it sickens me when, right now when Robbie says "of course we can't go anywhere, we're too poor". You know, that really bothers me, but okay. So there you go, in a nutshell... And I was kind of hoping to take them to that, whatever is downtown right now, but there's no money for buses so forget it.

R: ....So the kids don't have bus passes.

P: That's just a downer. And that's about it. But we can sit and watch TV, if you can afford cable.

R:	Do you have cable?

P:	Right now, not for long because I won't be able to afford it.... (w2w013).

During the course of this study, a number of people I told about my research commented that welfare recipients would have enough money if they did not spend it foolishly on unnecessary purchases such as cable television. Yet the excerpt above highlights the importance of cable for recreation because other recreational activities were cost prohibitive.

In addition to transportation costs to get to places, there were other reasons that even free events seemed prohibitive. This was due to the purchasable items at these places that children wanted. Describing that her family was limited to doing activities that cost little or no money, Loreen explained her hesitation to attend free events:

> …like there's all those things that they have, like those festivals and stuff, I wish I could take them. But my kids want the pop, they want the fries. I don't take them to places like that because it, it makes, I guess it takes away from the enjoyment for them because they want what everybody else is having, and I can't afford it. I don't take them to places like that (w2w019).

Loreen indicated that she'd like to "kill that ice cream man" because every time the ice cream truck came by her children pleaded for ice cream and she had to tell them that she could not afford it.

In sharing this story with a colleague, I was reminded of the nuances involved in understanding how poverty impacts individuals. When I told her about Loreen's reason for not going to the festival, her response was: "Well I don't let my kids have that stuff either. We take our own lunch to events". However, these situations are qualitatively different. Parents with the financial resources to purchase extras such as junk food for their children but choose not to have a different experience and so do their children. When parents with money say "no, not today" when their children ask for treats, their children know that they can have something special another day. Conversely, children in poverty are cognizant that another opportunity might not arise. In addition, the cupboards and fridges in homes of poverty do not contain treats that the parents might present to children at a moment's notice. For example, when I left Loreen her twenty dollar gift certificate, her son noticed it immediately and asked if he could go spend it. She asked him what he wanted to buy. He indicated that he wanted chips, ice cream and vanilla coke. These items, while perhaps limited in a health-conscious, middle-class home, were very rare treats for Loreen's sons because Loreen just could not afford to buy them for her children and they knew it. Not being able to purchase these items, distinct from choosing not to purchase them, further contributed to social isolation and reveals the marginalization of participants in both social and economic ways.

Summary and Conclusions

The findings documented in this chapter depict the challenges faced by participants as they attempted to subsist on a social assistance income. Health problems, income and food insecurity, stigma and social isolation all contributed to participants' daily struggles to subsist and point to a larger theme of systematic exclusion of people in poverty in various aspects of society, not simply by their choices, but through material, cultural and institutional processes. In her qualitative study of poor women's experiences with poverty, health and exclusion, Reid (2004) found that cultural, institutional and material exclusion were key components of the experience of poverty for participants. Women were culturally excluded through stereotypes about welfare mothers, institutionally excluded through a stigmatizing welfare system and two-tiered health and recreational systems, and materially excluded through chronic income insecurity. The findings from my study, similar to Reid's conclusions, suggest that these processes mutually reinforced one another. Income insecurity (material exclusion) led to stigma which reinforced the otherness of welfare recipients (cultural exclusion). Both income and food insecurity and stigma were entrenched by a welfare system which ensured that participants would continue to lack financial resources (institutional exclusion) and be viewed as sub-standard members of the social hierarchy. Participants were thus further re-entrenched on the margins, without the material resources to counter exclusionary processes.

The intent of this chapter was to set the stage for welfare-to-work activities, to show the daily conditions, struggles and systematic exclusion of welfare recipients as they moved into welfare-to-work activities. In the next chapter I discuss the experiences of welfare recipients as they attempted to become productive, market citizens, showing the promise that employability programs offered against the backdrop of struggle, hopelessness, and exclusion as welfare recipients.

Chapter Five
"Extending the Alberta Advantage," Part I: The Promise of Becoming a Market Citizen

> *"Albertans value independence. We prefer to make it on our own, without government support. If we need help we want a hand up, not a handout."*
> (AHRE, 2001)

Set against the backdrop of income and food insecurity, daily struggles to survive, and the stigma and social isolation experienced on social assistance, this chapter introduces specific welfare-to-work policies and programs, and shows how welfare-to-work activities, from the perspective of the participants, offered hope out of a life of poverty and despair. First, I highlight some key assumptions and assertions from the SFI Policy Manual, as well as provide a broad overview of employability programs in Alberta, situating groups of participants from this study within these policies and programs. In the remainder of the chapter, I examine the experiences of participants as they engaged in activities intended to secure labour-market attachment, showing how the promise of welfare-to-work was further instilled through positive experiences in employability programs.

Qualitative data analysis is about sense-making (Denzin, 1994). Making sense of the transition from welfare to work for the participants of this study was taxing. There were a number of factors that contributed to this. First, because I followed participants for one year, I needed to consider how the transition impacted them throughout the year. Second, the participants were in a variety of programs, and some were not in programs at all, which created substantial variability in my study. The programs from which participants came, while all classified as Skills for Work programs, varied considerably in scope and length, and some of the participants started in one program but moved into another. Furthermore, the outcomes at the end of the transition do not neatly distinguish one particular group of participants over another, and this further contributes to the puzzle. Like human existence, then, this story is not neat and tidy. Although I highlight themes and conclusions derived through sorting and shaking the data in various ways, I also try to represent the nuances, contradictions and puzzles.

Income Support Policies In Alberta

Reflective of a larger Canadian trend to implement active social policy (Jenson, 2003), social assistance recipients in Alberta have experienced significant policy changes in the last decade. In the early 1990s the first major shift occurred, resulting in a new set of policies to guide income support for welfare recipients, called Supports for Independence (SFI). Fundamental to this policy change was that social assistance was now provided with strings attached – welfare recipients were required to engage in employment-related activities in order to qualify for benefits. This set of policies, under The Social Development Act, was in effect during the time period in which the data were collected for this study (2001-2002). It must be noted that in the spring of 2004 (after the time period for which data were collected for this study), a new Act, the Income and Employment Supports Act, was proclaimed and thus repealed a number of other Acts including the following: the Income Support Recovery Act; The Student and Temporary Employment Act; the Widows' Pension Act; and The Social Development Act. Supporting policy manuals have become defunct (although some sections of some Acts will be repealed at a later date all will be obsolete by 2007) and replaced by one set of policies as detailed in the new Income Support Policy Manual. Under the Income and Employment Supports Act, a number of income support programs in Alberta are combined under a new program, "Alberta Works". Relevant to this discussion is that the SFI policies have been incorporated into the new Act and set of policies. Although the SFI program is currently defunct, it will be analyzed here as it was in place when this study was conducted. Importantly, this analysis is still relevant given that the most recent set of policy guidelines again reflects a continuity of the policy shift in Alberta that began in 1990 (the similarities in policies will be explored in chapter 6).

Other key policies relevant to participants of this study include childcare subsidy policies and two national programs to assist families with children: the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit Supplement. Low-income families in Alberta are eligible for childcare subsidies of up to $475 for a child between the ages of zero and 19 months, and $380 for a child 19 months or older (Government of Alberta, 2002a). Welfare recipients are eligible for full childcare subsidies if they are actively engaged in welfare-to-work activities, which may include attending an employability program or working. Additionally, there are two tiers of national benefits offered to families with children in Canada. The first tier program is the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). This is a federal income-tested program that is offered to all families with a net income of $76, 680 or less which constitutes the majority of Canadian families (82% in 2001) (Battle, Mendelson, Meyer, Millar & Whiteford, 2001; National Child Benefit, 2004). The maximum amount is paid to low-income families with a diminishing amount paid to families as income increases.

The second tier program is the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS), a joint initiative between federal and provincial governments which gives additional income to low-income families with the goals of reducing the depth of child poverty and ensuring that families are better off when parents are working (National Child

Benefit, 2004). Maximum benefits for a family which qualifies for both the CCTB and the NCBS in 2001 were $2, 372 for the first child, $2,172 for a second child, and $2,175 for each additional child (Battle et al., 2001). Because provincial governments are permitted to claw-back social assistance benefits by the same amount as the National Child Benefit Supplement, which most have done, welfare recipients are not better off with the CCTB, whereas working-poor families are, thus providing an incentive to work. These policies are reviewed briefly here because of their importance for welfare recipients mandated into employability programs, and will be referred to in ensuing sections as I explicate their connections to participants' experiences.

"Anybody can have a job who wants one[4]": Supports for Independence (SFI) Policy Goals

With high oil and gas prices, Alberta has experienced a booming economy in recent years, and high annual growth rates which are expected to continue this year (Scotton, 2004). Amidst this economic growth, there is a perception by many citizens, as suggested in the title of this section, that what is required to be gainfully employed is drive and determination. This perception is grounded in the ethos of individualism. According to an individualistic perspective, resolve and fortitude lead to employment, which, in turn, leads to self-sufficiency (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler &Tipton, 1991; Peck, 2001b). The assumptions of an individualistic perspective resonate in the implicit and explicit values and goals of Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE), and more specifically in the income support program, SFI. This perspective is most transparent in the primary objective of SFI to move welfare recipients toward self-sufficiency.

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[4] This statement was made by an Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) Employee in an informal conversation, October 2001.

In chapter two I explored the concept of self-sufficiency as a key goal of welfare reform generally, and in Alberta specifically, suggesting that self-sufficiency is an ideologically loaded term. Reflecting the dominant discourse of individualism, the SFI Policy Manual is premised upon the belief that self-sufficiency is the best alternative for an individual. For instance, a key principle of the SFI program is to provide "active measures that support independence in the belief that people are better off working than not working" (AFSS, 1993, Introduction, p. 3). Subsequently, one of the program goals for SFI is "to assist clients to achieve independence and self-sufficiency to the greatest extent possible" (AFSS, 1993, Introduction, p. 2).

In SFI policies, the extent to which a person is required to engage in welfare-to-work activities is dependent upon his or her employability status, which is a fluid concept based upon specific designations that distinguish those expected and not expected to work. Below, I briefly describe these designations to provide the foundation for a comparison of these policies and the experiences of welfare-to-work participants in my study

Welfare recipients are divided into one of two categories: those who are "expected to work", and those who are "not expected to work" (SFI manual, section 02-02-02 to 02-02-03). Those expected to work are then further grouped into the following sub-categories. First, there are clients who receive "supplement to earnings" to increase their market income because they do not make enough to meet their basic needs Second, there are clients who are currently unemployed, but considered employable if they undergo some form of employment and training support program. These clients are classified into those requiring minimal intervention, moderate intervention, or long term intervention. Also included in the employment and training support category are those who are awaiting Employment Insurance benefits, those attending employment preparation programs and those awaiting student-finance funding. SFI workers categorize a welfare recipient into one of these designations after completing a summary "documenting the client's circumstances, expectations and their decisions", or filling out an HRE Employability Assessment (AFSS, 1993, 02-03, p. 5). Unfortunately, I was unable to access the forms and related instructions for assessing recipients, as these forms are internal AHRE documents. However, through the exploration of participant experiences, I was still able to evaluate the extent to which stated policies recognize and address the actualities of participants' lives.

SFI recipients who are not expected to work are placed into one of two categories: transitional support and assured support. Transitional support is provided to those with health problems lasting longer than three months, those with family care responsibilities, and those over 50 years of age. Those who are offered assured support are persons defined as having severe employment barriers that preclude full-time continuous employment in the competitive labour force (AFSS, 1993, 02-03, p. 6). Employment barriers as outlined by the SFI policies include medical impairment, lack of formal education, poor social skills, poor work history, age, history of unsuccessful intervention and other social factors. The manual specifies that although one factor in itself may not be a barrier, it may become problematic when combined with others.

Although this list appears exhaustive, a careful reading of it raises some questions. For example, although a lack of education is recognized as a barrier, the policy states that a person with an education of grade eight or less, combined with other barriers, may preclude employment. However, it is questionable as to whether it is reasonable to expect a person with a grade nine education, even without other barriers, to be employable in the current labour market. Furthermore, if a person does not have more than a grade nine education, it is possible that there are other factors that contributed to this barrier such as intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, the absence of role models, or inadequate supports within the school system. Under the specification of "other social factors", an "extensive criminal record" is listed as a deterrent. However, even a criminal record consisting of relatively minor charges such as a shoplifting charge, still has an impact on employment prospects. Two of my participants, for instance, disclosed that they had criminal records which they identified as impacting their employment prospects. If a person is not bondable it is unlikely he or she will be able to obtain employment.

In short, SFI's primary goal, reflecting an ethos of individualism, is to promote self-sufficiency through moving welfare recipients into employment, with the underlying assumption that working is best. Inherent within these values is the belief that what it takes to become independent is self-determination. In the analysis to follow, I will consider these policy goals in relation to the experiences of participants in this study, to determine the extent to which these goals reflect the actualities of participants' lives. Before I shift to this analysis, however, I will briefly review key employability programs as they relate to participants of this study.

"Get the skills to pay the bills":[5] Description of employability programs and program participation

To facilitate labour-market attachment for unemployed Albertans, including social assistance recipients, the Government of Alberta provides three umbrella programs: a Skills Development Program, a Self-Employment Program, and a Skills For Work program (AHRE/Learning 2000-2001). In the booklet designed for potential program users, Back on Track: A Description of Labour-Market Programs, it is explained that "Labour Market programs are about getting the skills you need so you can get a job. They're about getting Back on Track -- finding employment in the shortest possible time" (AHRE/Learning 2000-2001, p. 2, emphasis in original). The implied assumption in this manual is that unemployment has resulted from getting "off track" in someway, revealing the rhetoric of individualism.

The Skills Development Program includes apprenticeship programs, academic upgrading programs, and short-term skill training to assist clients in qualifying for entry-level positions. The Self-Employment Program is designed to help clients create their own jobs by developing a business. The Skills for Work program, in which 13 of the 17 participants in this study were involved for at least some time during data collection, provides a variety of employability programs that may include job-specific skill training, work experience, personal development and academic upgrading. This program was designed particularly for those who "have difficulty getting and keeping a job" (AHRE/Learning, 2000-2001; p. 21). Under the three umbrella programs are various sub-programs including a variety of job placement programs and job training programs. The Alberta Community

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[5] This quote is taken from a poster I saw in an upgrading college which advertised a number of short-term skills programs such as power point, airbrakes, excel, flag person safety, defensive driving and a calving seminar.

Employment (ACE) program, in which welfare recipients are placed in non-profit organizations to gain work experience, and Job Corps, in which welfare recipients receive work experience in government departments, are two such programs. The estimated number of participants in welfare-to-work programs in 2000/2001 was as follows: 1610 in training on the job; 5944 in job placement; 233 in the Alberta Community Employment (ACE) program; 379 in Alberta Job Corps; 64 in the Employment Skills Program (ESP); 18, 003 in skills development, and 5283 in skills for work (Gorlick and Brethour, 2002)[6]. These numbers show that of the approximately 27,000 welfare recipients on the SFI caseload in 2001, many were involved in welfare-to-work activities in recent years.

Having briefly outlined the main policies and programs relevant to the participants of this study, I now turn to the experiences of participants as they began their transition from welfare to work. I show that, compared to the hopelessness experienced while on welfare, employability programs offered hope and a future to welfare recipients.

"The Promise": Beginning the Transition from Welfare to Work

When I first interviewed the participants, I noticed that, for the most part, there was a sense of optimism about the future. While most resented the pressure from SFI staff to engage in work-related programs, experienced some nervousness about attending the programs, worried about how their children would transition to daycare, and were anxious about managing transportation for themselves and their children, the majority acknowledged the benefits of attending the programs. When I asked them about their perspectives on welfare reform, participants overwhelmingly indicated that it was a positive move forward. Their accounts show that attending school offered hope, connection, activity, structure, security, and purpose in their lives, together forming what I have conceptualized here as "the promise".

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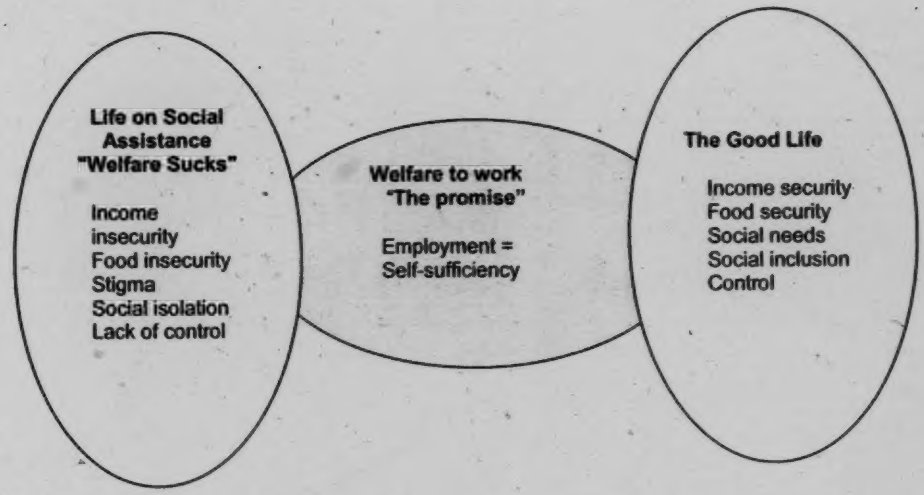
[6] It must be noted that the numbers above do not equal the total number of welfare recipients, because one person could be in more than one program in a given year.

In Figure 3, I diagram "the promise" as explained by participants. The first sphere, "welfare sucks," represents the experiences of participants on social assistance. As described in chapter four, participants experienced income insecurity, food insecurity, lack of control, surveillance, stigma and social isolation while on social assistance. According to "the promise", welfare-to-work would bring hardship to an end through assisting participants in skill development and job search which would result in a "good job". Employment would permanently end reliance on social

Figure 3.The promise


Life on Social Assistance "Welfare Sucks"
Income insecurity
Food insecurity
Stigma
Social isolation
Lack of control
Welfare to work "The promise"
Employment = Self-sufficiency
The Good Life
Income security
Food security
Social needs
Social inclusion
Control

assistance and lead to self-sufficiency. With self-sufficiency would come "the good life" which was an antithesis of the experiences while on social assistance. It included income security, food security, social inclusion and control and autonomy.

By and large, study participants in employability programs found the program facilitators were supportive and understanding, and they felt valued and respected in the classrooms. The programs gave them an opportunity to interact with other adults, reducing the social isolation they had experienced while they were at home full-time. The programs also gave them a sense of moving forward which, in turn, gave them hope for the future. The promise of welfare-to-work is captured in the following excerpts:

Tamara
And I mean I know, like once I'm done [my program], I'll be able to go out there full force and get a job, no problem. I feel more confident now, in the what, seven weeks that I've been in the program, than I have in a long time. …when I first came into the program I was quiet, I was shy, I was on my own most of the time. And now, get me to shut up. (laugh) (w2w021).

Natalia
P: So then I phoned them and said I want to come back in there but I want to get into the [employability] program. Because the [employability] program will get me work. So by next month I'll be working somewhere…

R: So at the end of this year you're supposed to have a job?

P: Oh yeah, you're guaranteed a job. And if not, they have a year follow-up as well, so they'll help you if you can't find a job… (W2w010-03)

Loreen
My son knows about this [employability] program and how they're going to be helping me find a job…. he knows how hard it is with what we've got…And now I was telling him about [the employability program] and going, like they're going to be helping me find a job, hopefully a good job, good money, right. Now he's spending my paychecks before I even get them now, you know, this is what we'll do, like…(w2w019).

The group of participants not tied to any formal employability group – what I have called "the independents" – was generally less optimistic about their future at the beginning of the year. They worried more than the others that finding full-time work that would provide a living wage and fit with the needs of pre-school children might be difficult. Samantha, for instance, recognized that welfare-to-work programs would likely lead to low-paying jobs without benefits and that it was more difficult for women to earn enough to make ends meet. She stated:

> I don't ever want to have to rely on a man. I want to be able to make enough, you know. Unfortunately women don't, so you have to find some sort of a career that you can make, you know, money at and have, um your benefits because you really need benefits, you know (w2w017).

She struggled to find a program that would both result in full-time employment with a living wage, and fit with her responsibilities as a single parent. She indicated that she wished to be a nurse, but realized that the shift-work involved would not fit with her parenting role. Eventually, she chose a para-legal program. Similarly, Karen recognized that finding full-time employment was difficult, and felt that she might have to work two part-time jobs to earn enough money to survive (w2w007). Still, this group, like the others, hoped to find work and permanently conclude their reliance on social assistance benefits.

That the participants of this study viewed welfare reform as positive was surprising, baffling, and, quite frankly, disconcerting for me. My theoretical framework (as explained in chapter 2), which poses that welfare-to-work initiatives are a violation of social citizenship rights and evidence of a shift to market citizenship, implies that mandatory welfare-to-work is punitive and therefore likely to be a negative experience for participants. However, participants did not view the employability programs in this light. In contrast, they viewed welfare-to-work as an opportunity, not a further limitation. Thus, a paradox is evident. Critics of welfare reform have conceptualized welfare-to-work as an extension of welfare which diminishes entitlement to a basic level of needs and explicitly makes attachment to the labour force the only legitimate membership into society, making it in effect "bad welfare" (Dwyer, 1998; Shaver, 2002; White, 2003). In contrast, welfare recipients view welfare-to-work as "good welfare". Where critics see welfare-to-work as "welfare with strings", participants see welfare-to-work as "welfare with strings of hope."

In hindsight, this finding makes sense. What I failed to realize as I conceptualized this study was that welfare as a social right disappeared a decade ago, and frankly, was never a true social right before that. Feminists have pointed out the contradictions of welfare for women, arguing that although income assistance was supposed to offer choice and independence for women, instead it further oppressed them, making them dependents of the state rather than their spouses (Bashevkin; 2002; Fraser, 1989; Marshall 1994). Arguing that the U.S. social-welfare system is two-tiered, with one (masculine) sub-system composed of "possessive individuals"[7] who pay into social insurance schemes and therefore buy entitlement, and the other (feminine) sub-system which is composed of clients, or the antithesis of possessive individuals, Fraser (1989) shows how welfare further strips women of social rights. Furthermore, the deliberate attempt of governments to focus on caseload reduction in the early 1990s had significant implications even for those who were still eligible for welfare, providing increased social regulation (White, 2003). That social assistance receipt is riddled with stigma, social exclusion, hardship and income and food insecurity is not new. Being accepted into programs that would move an individual into mainstream society, offering all the good things that society had to offer, seemed like a gift, not a punishment. In short, welfare-to-work seemed to be a carrot offered to welfare recipients, not a stick.

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[7] This term was originally used by C.B. MacPherson, 1964.

Participation in market-related activities

In addition to providing the promise of self-sufficiency and subsequent autonomy and control, the promise proffered by welfare-to-work was further accentuated by the benefits experienced by study participants in employability programs and jobs. These are detailed below.

Interaction with other adults

One of the advantages of employability programs and/or employment was that they offered an opportunity to get together with other adults, thus breaking the isolation that many participants experienced while solely on social assistance. Going to class or to work offered an opportunity to converse and socialize with other adults in similar situations and get a break from their children. Mel, for instance, described how he did not look forward to the weekends because of the loneliness and boredom he experienced then. Interaction with other adults also provided a distraction from constant worries. Loreen captures this sentiment: "I went to [my employability program] because I, I was just going crazy staying here and not doing anything, dwelling too much on what had happened before" (w2w019). Importantly, Loreen found that her employability program offered a diversion from difficult memories that depressed her.

Sense of purpose

In addition to breaking isolation, the employability programs and/or employment gave participants a sense of purpose. Participants described their involvement in programs as worthwhile because, in addition to breaking isolation, employability programs and/or employment also gave them "something to do", helped to release them from being "stuck", and gave them a routine, something to get up for in the morning. While being at home was described as dull, going to school or work was stimulating. Karen, a mother with one two-year old son who was working in a full-time retail job, described her experience of being at home with her son.

R: So you wouldn't want to stay home full time with him?

P: No… 'Cause staying home all the time, I think you'd pretty much be going insane.

R: What do you think would make you go insane?

P: When you're at home, you're always in the same place, always doing the same things. You need something to do. At work, I'm getting away from the house. Even when we are at home together, we need to go somewhere. Your house just gets boring… I just think you need to do something. It makes you feel good about yourself (w2w07-03).

So important was the sense of purpose offered by employability programs or jobs that some participants made connections between having a sense of purpose and health. When asked about what contributed to her health, Tamara, for instance, indicated that going to her program was one factor. She stated: "…I have to have something to do, or a purpose. And this, at least, gives me something" (W2w021-02).

"I'm a student": Impact of change in status

One cluster of ten participants from various programs seemed to be especially optimistic about the transition from welfare to work. I struggled to unravel the source of their optimism. Upon closer analysis, I discovered that the most significant factor contributing to the hopefulness for these participants was that for the duration of the program their income source changed from SFI to some form of student-finance funding. This funding varied somewhat in source and amount. For seven of the ten participants, funding came through the provincial Skills Development Program, which provided "student assistance" monies for participants in approved programs lasting longer than two months (AHRE/Alberta Learning; 2000-2001). Another participant received a grant through a federal youth initiative. One other participant received a substantial increase in funding through a student loan (which she would eventually have to pay back) and one of the Aboriginal participants received student-finance funding through her reserve. These last two participants did not qualify for student assistance through the province because they had previously exited employability programs without graduating due to personal problems. They therefore failed to demonstrate "academic progress", a requirement to qualify for future provincial student assistance funding (AHRE/Learning, 2000-2001).

Regardless of the various sources of student-finance income, the change from SFI to student income seemed to have a two-pronged impact. First, it elevated their status from welfare recipient to student. Compared to the substantial surveillance they felt while collecting SFI, a student-finance income meant increased autonomy and decreased stigma. Dana, for instance, describes this experience as being positive because, in addition to "doing something" and receiving more money, she was no longer required to fill out client cards (w2w020). Second, and most importantly, however, was the change in income for the majority of participants. For welfare recipients who had received student-finance benefits, welfare-to-work initiatives meant not only a positive change in status, but also a significant increase in the amount of income they had each month. This factor, more than any other, seemed to impact the way that they viewed their transition from welfare to work.

"Money buys happiness": Impact of increased income

My parents told me as a child that money doesn't buy happiness, but if they were going to be unhappy, they'd rather be rich and unhappy than poor and unhappy. What they were saying, I think, was that money allows for a certain amount of security that enhances one's life whether or not one feels happy at any given time. This insight reverberates for me now as I think through an important finding of this study: money does buy happiness.

Depending on the content and length of participants' employability programs, some were eligible to receive student assistance funding from the province. For a single parent with one child, the maximum amount allowed under this program was $1210 plus childcare, tuition and books (AHRE/Learning, 2000-2001). With an additional income of approximately $200 from the child tax benefit, a single parent with one child could earn approximately $1400 per month on student-finance funding, compared to approximately $950 per month on SFI and child tax. Not surprisingly, participants valued the opportunity to move from social assistance to student-finance funding as it meant a significant increase in income which subsequently had implications for the health and well-being of their families. With increased income participants were able to pay outstanding bills, save money for the future, and purchase needed household, clothing and food items for their families. When I asked Tamara, for instance, what it felt like to move from SFI to student finance, she quickly replied: "I almost feel like a queen" (w2w021). This response was grounded in the actuality that with student-finance funding participants had enough income to purchase basic needs as well as engage in occasional recreational pursuits. Some described buying better clothes so that they could be seen in public, taking their children to McDonald's once a month, going swimming or to movies on occasion, and not having to say no to their kids all of the time (w2w002; w2w005; w2w016; w2w020; w2w021; w2w022). Some participants were even able to save some money each month (w2w002; w2w017; w2w021), putting it away for future bouts of income insecurity, which most of them anticipated despite their optimism about obtaining employment and leaving social assistance permanently.

Trudy, a mother of four who moved from a pre-employability program to an academic upgrading program which qualified her for a student-finance program through her reserve, described in detail how moving onto student-finance funding impacted her financial situation positively.

> … because of my funding my daughter wants to go to the store. Not like before, when I was on welfare. I couldn't even give 'em a dollar or anything to go to the store, and those are the little things that really, that really…. That's what they really like. And that's what means a lot to them… just to have like a dollar just to go to the store. They like to do that now, because of my funding…When I was on welfare, I felt bad because I had no money and ….I'd have to explain to them that we need every dollar. What are we gonna' eat? We can't live on junk food. You know, I would have to do all this explaining, and I don't find that right. Having to explain to my children like, you know, this is what we need the money for, and this is what we need the money for, and this is what we need the money for. There are some things that they can't even buy, and then my daughter wants it so bad. And then it's like, well what are we gonna' do? Are we gonna eat the toy? Like we can't eat the toy, we need the money for food. So, now, because of the funding, it's a little more higher than on welfare, so … It's a lot better, money-wise. Like I can budget, like I don't mind budgeting at all….It helps, it helps a lot. It

> helps, like, being on this funding, it helps a lot 'cause I can buy things and do these things. Like Pow Wow Dancing, I can make the outfits. A little bit of money comes in handy, now (w2w005-02).

In the segment above, Trudy addresses several issues related to adequate income including not having to explain her income insecurity to her children, being able to provide special treats for her children, and having the opportunity to engage in recreational activities.

Trudy's explanation of the impact of increased income resonated with me because I noticed a significant change in the ambiance of her townhouse upon my second visit. Below is an excerpt from my field notes regarding this change. I was struck by how much more pleasant her place felt.

> The other thing I noticed upon going into Trudy's house is just how much better it looks. She has pictures on the wall which I don't remember, a new area carpet covering the lino in the living room, a new TV, I think, and just a general appearance of cleanliness and hominess. Her front screen door has been replaced (last time it had been kicked in by her brother, and the glass was missing). I remember last time I was there how dirty and poor it looked. This time it seemed bright and pleasant. Perhaps it was the absence of smoke that made such a difference. Clearly, there were new things. When I arrived, Trudy was sewing (on a sewing machine) dresses for her girls. She says that now that she has more money, she can afford to do these kinds of things. (Field Notes W2w005-02, January 30, 2002).

In purchasing better quality clothing, treats for children, outings to restaurants, and recreational pursuits, participants were expressing their ability to use additional income to purchase goods which enable greater participation in society.

A number of participants described how the increase in funding after moving to student finance not only affected their ability to buy extra things and save money, but also impacted the quality of food they were able to buy. Not surprisingly, many of the participants on student finance described the ability to buy more fruits, vegetables and meat (w2w002; w2w005; w2w016; w2w021; w2w022). An increase in income, in addition to allowing for more and better food, also provided an opportunity to increase food variety. Melanie indicated that increased income enabled her to buy a greater variety of food to feed her daughter. With additional income she purchased new foods such as cheese and jello, and discovered that her daughter liked eating apples. Because there was more variety, the children had better appetites. Trudy, for instance, described how, with more money, she was able to purchase foods she could not afford in the past, including fruits, vegetables, and chicken and how this improved her children's appetites.

> Like before, they just like "Oh, the same thing."" It's like kinda' boring after a while for them to eat the same thing over and over. It's like I have to explain to them, and then I feel bad like having to feed them the same thing over and over again. But now, because now of the money change, they like what they eat now. A whole different now. They have more variety than before [when] it's always the same: Kraft dinner and beans and bank food stuff. And now it's like... they like their food now (Trudy, W2w005-02).

Participants' descriptions of eating bland, "food bank" food while food insecure is consistent with findings from a qualitative study of food insecure households in Quebec. Hamelin, Beaudry and Habicht (2002) found that a monotonous diet was a key feature of eating while food insecure, and contributed to a general sense of impoverishment. That appetites improved with better quality and more variety of food is hardly surprising.

Some participants, in describing the purchase of food with additional income, made a link between food and health. More food, better quality food, and a variety of food positively impacted the health of themselves and their children through being able to eat tasty, fresh, well-balanced meals more often. This food improved health, evidenced by the fact that they felt better and their children did not get sick as often. The link that participants made between the importance of an abundant supply of a variety of quality foods and health is supported by research on the relationship between food and health. Health Canada (2002) reports, for instance, that people who report food insecurity are also more likely to report poor or fair health, and more likely to have multiple health problems including diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure. Inversely, a sufficient amount of quality food is linked to better health.

The impact of having additional income, provided by student-finance funding for 10 of the participants for roughly one year, and for a few others through earnings, was significant. Although participants continued to have relatively low incomes, the difference in the amount of income between social assistance and student finance was enough to significantly enhance the quality of their lives. The opportunity to purchase needed items and better quality food, coupled with enhanced recreational opportunities such as going out to eat, going to the movies, or going to the swimming pool made a positive difference in their lives.

In addition to improving life in the present, having additional income enabled participants to secure against their future, much like an insurance policy, however modest it might be. Below is a segment of a conversation with Penny, which illustrates the notion of additional income as security.

R: So, how do you think things have changed since before you started [your program] and now?

P: More security. More security for me. More stability, so when you don't have stability with your finances and whatnot, you tend to be a little bit worried about it, and you know, when you don't have enough food in the house, you kinda go, "Well [how] am I going to feed him?"....And now there's lots of food in my house. I make sure of it. There's lots of food in the house. And now my freezers are full; my cupboards are full, and, you know.

R: How did you manage to do all of that?

P: Student finance. You know, they allow you so much for food, they allow you so much for rent, they allow you so much for your bills, and all that stuff, so you pretty well gotta' still do what you need to do but being on Student Finance you're able to

> pay all your bills and your rent and not have to worry about where your groceries are coming from because you have that extra excess cash (W2w002-02).

One participant, Danielle, who did receive student finance, but had earned a living wage in the past, eloquently describes the difference between having money and not having money.

> I've seen myself not have money, and I've seen myself have money, and I am a happier person with money. It's less stress, no worry, you know, so. Money doesn't buy happiness, it does buy happiness up to a point, not personal happiness, but some tangible things, security and less stress, you don't have to worry. (W2w014)

Money in itself may not bring happiness, but it purchases goods and services such as nutritious food, adequate clothing, and recreational activities which are known to enhance health and well-being (Health Canada, 2004). Additionally, money can reduce stress and anxiety through increasing food and income security. For those welfare recipients who benefited from increased income during the transition from welfare to work, either through student-finance funding or through earned income, the opportunity to experience life with a few more dollars and a little less angst about day-to-day needs cannot be underestimated. Whether or not the benefits of this income increase continued after student-finance funding concluded will be explored in the next chapter.

In summary, participants, by and large, viewed welfare reform at the beginning of their transition as positive and filled with potential. Set against the backdrop of income and food insecurity, stigma, and social isolation – all associated with social assistance -- study participants viewed employability programs as their ticket out of poverty. They hoped that at the end of the employability program, they would be able to find employment, enabling them to become legitimate members of society. This hope was enhanced through positive experiences in employability programs, and increased funding through student finance for many participants. In the next chapter, I examine the outcomes for participants who engaged in activities intended to secure labour-market attachment to consider whether or not the promise of welfare-to-work was fulfilled.

Chapter Six
"Extending the Alberta Advantage," Part II: The Reality of Becoming a Market Citizen

"In Alberta, we absolutely believe this, the best safety net in the world…is a job[8]*"*
Clint Dunford, Alberta Minister of Human Resources

In this chapter, I document the reality (juxtaposed against the promise in chapter five) for participants as they attempted to move from welfare-to-work. I show how welfare-to-work policies and programs had an impact on the economic lives of participants, including their employment outcomes and subsequent market incomes, detailing their experiences in attempting to become market citizens. Then, I examine the less visible, non-economic work involved in becoming a market citizen including the day-to-day schedule, childcare arrangements, and family-functioning of participants – what I refer to here as the "work behind the work" of a job or employability program. After a thorough exploration of study participants' experiences with welfare reform, I shift the focus of my analysis to an examination of the social processes which influence the day-to-day lives of participants. Grounded in the experiences of the participants, I map the social relations which inform these experiences. I show how neo-liberal ideas have shaped the recent development of the "social investment state" and subsequent welfare-to-work policies in Canada, as revealed in the day-to-day experiences of participants. I question the assumptions inherent within welfare-to-work policies, and make recommendations about the expectations of welfare reform.

Figure 4 diagrams the reality of welfare-to-work for participants in this study. Whereas the beginning of the welfare-to-work transition meant an optimistic outlook for most participants, the middle to end of the transition brought more diversity in their experiences. The diversity of participant experiences was associated with various factors including the extent to which job search yielded positive results, income-related outcomes for participants, and how employability programs and/or work impacted the day-to-day functioning of the participants' families, including work/family balance, childcare arrangements, and day-to-day scheduling and organization. On balance, the promise of welfare-to-work was not fulfilled, and the majority of participants continued to experience income insecurity, food insecurity and social exclusion.

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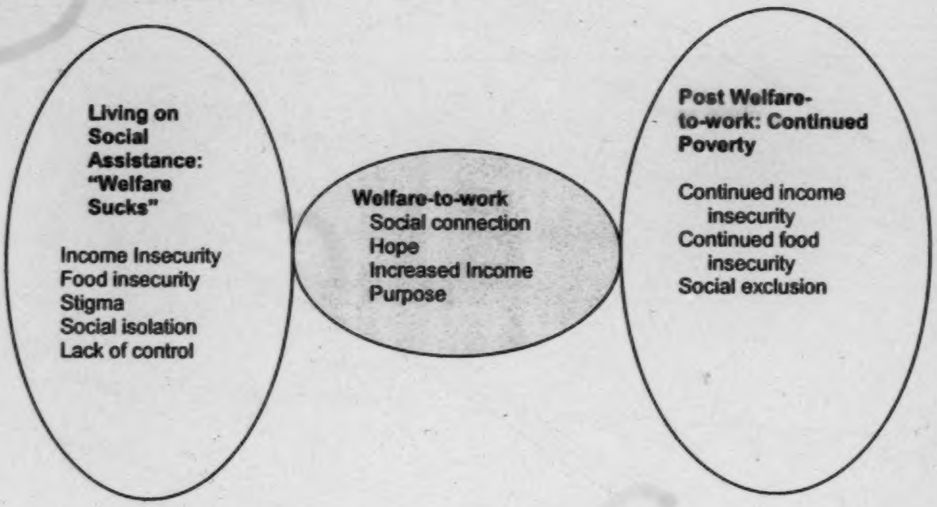
[8] Taken from Cryderman, K. (2004, March 25).

Figure 4. The reality


Living on Social Assistance: "Welfare Sucks"
Income Insecurity
Food insecurity
Stigma
Social isolation
Lack of control
Welfare-to-work
Social connection
Hope
Increased Income
Purpose
Post Welfare-to-work: Continued Poverty
Continued income insecurity
Continued food insecurity
Social exclusion

"The Reality": The Experiences of Welfare-to-Work

Employment outcomes

Table 5 provides a summary of the employment outcomes of participants in this study. Although this study is not about mapping who got jobs and who did not, it is important to examine this information to explore the link between the concept of self-sufficiency as used in SFI policies, and the outcomes for welfare recipients engaged in activities intended to promote self-sufficiency. Furthermore, I have mapped the success of participants in obtaining employment to mirror the kinds of information governments use to chart the success of employability programs based on employment outcomes (Table 5). At the end of one year, 52.5% of the participants in this study had some type of employment. Although my sample is not intended to be statistically representative of outcomes in employability programs, it is interesting that this number closely mirrors the statistic given by the Government of Alberta for the Skills to Work program. A summary of outcomes from various employability programs shows that the Skills for Work Program had a success rate of 54%, measured by the "percentage of participants employed post-intervention" (Government of Alberta Annual Report 2001/2002, p. 40).

There are two problems with the way in which information in Table 5 is represented. First, when discussing outcomes, we need to be clear about when the outcomes are documented. It must be noted that the government only tracks participants three to six months post intervention; however, a longer tracking schedule may produce different results. Other studies shed light on this issue. Frenette and Picot (2003) studied tax data of former welfare recipients who had been off the welfare rolls for two years prior to the inception of their study. They

Table 5: Employment Outcomes after one year of welfare-to-work activities

Name	**W2w No.**	**Program**	**Interim: Another Training Program**	**FT Job**	**PT Job**	**New Program**	**Nothing Changed**
Barbara	W2w004	Pre-employability program	x Federal Youth Initiative (FYI)		x		
Trudy	W2w005	Pre-employability program	x Graduate Equivalent Diploma (GED)			x Technical college	
Bonnie	W2w006	Pre-employability program	x Alberta Community Employment (ACE)				x
Samantha	W2w017	Independent		x			
Karen	W2w007	Independent		x			
Carla	W2w106	Independent			x		
Danielle	W2w014	Independent				x Childcare training program	
Natalia	W2w010	Six month employability program				X One year employ. program	
Shelley	W2w011	Six month	x University				x
Carrie	W2w013	Six month			x		
Sarah	W2w015	Six month	Part-time job				x
Loreen	W2w019	Six month					x
Melanie	W2w016	One year employability program			x		
Penny	W2w002	One year		x			
Dana	W2w020	One year			x		
Tamara	W2w021	One year					x
Mei	W2w022	One year		x			
Total= 17 participants		Pre-employ=3 6 month= 5 1 year= 5 indepent=4	Interim activity=5 participants	FT = 4	PT=5	Another program= 3	No change=5

found that among those welfare leavers, 35% returned to welfare within one year, and 50% returned within five years. Using random assignment methodology, The Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) found that although income assistance use dropped for the program group mid-study, by the middle of the sixth year of their study, the use of income assistance programs was the same in both the program and control groups (Michalopoulos, Tattrie, et al. 2002). These findings are also consistent with U.S. studies which found that 60 to 70% of welfare leavers returned to welfare within five years (Harris, 1996; Meyer & Cancian, 1996).

A second problem with the information provided in Table 5 is that in its simplicity, it excludes critical information about the nature of the work obtained, including hours of work, the rate of pay, and the amount of job security offered by the position. For instance, did the job obtained by the participant provide a living wage? Did it include benefits? Did the position offer the employee enough hours to provide an adequate income? This simple table demonstrates how too little information can be misrepresentative. Although the results given in Table 5 can be interpreted as successful outcomes of employability programs, further analysis suggests that additional data are needed about "what happened" in order to make an informed analysis of these results.

In addition to more detail about the quality of the employment, the unpaid work that happens on the edges of a paid work day such as the day-to-day childcare, travel, housework and the procurement of food – "the work outside the work" – is missing. Official records or texts written by the "relations of ruling," similar to the information provided in Table 5, do not tend to reveal much about the *details of the process*, but rather focus on the *outcomes.* This study, however, spells out the *process* – the day-to-day events, to shed light on the context of the *outcome*. Its focus is on what happened to the participants while they were in this transition from welfare to work, providing an opportunity to map the larger social structures that frame these experiences. In this analysis, then, the means are as important, or more important, than the end.

Table 6 provides additional information on the employment outcomes of participants. Four of 17 participants (23.5%) obtained full-time jobs by the end of the year in which I followed them. Of these four, one person obtained an entry level position doing data entry for a relatively large company, working 35 hours per week between the hours of 7:30 am and 3:30 pm. She was the highest paid participant in my study, with an annual net market income of $18, 000. Another person was hired to work full-time in a retail chain. At the end of the year in which I followed her, she was promoted to assistant manager within the store where she was working, making an hourly wage of $8.00 per hour for 40 hours per week, or $14, 360 per annum. This job entailed shift work. Both of these participants had jobs that included a benefits package upon the successful completion of a probationary period. One of the other participants, Penny, obtained a job with a small family-owned business that seemed relatively secure. She worked from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm for $8.00 per hour, 40 hours per week, or $14, 360 per annum. This job did not include benefits, and the summer after which I interviewed her, the family she worked for was closing the business to go on a vacation. Penny did not know what she was going to do for that time period. The fourth participant who obtained full-time employment worked as a labourer at approximately $9.00 per hour ($17, 280 per annum) between the hours of 7:30 am and 4:00 pm, but he was not sure if the job continued past the summer

Table 6. The transition from welfare-to-work over a period of one year, 2001- 2002

Name	**Program**	**Employment Status/Source of Income Beginning**	**Employment Status/Source of Income Middle (6 months)**	**Employment Status/Source of Income End**
Penny	One-year employability program	Unemployed/SFI Medical	F-T Employability Program (one year) /SFB	**Permanent FT Job, 9-5, M-F, $8.00/hour/no benefits**
Barbara	Pre-employability program	Part-time Employability Program/SFI	F-T Employability Program/federal finance (youth)	*Temporary P-T Employment, M-F, 9-1, no benefits*
Trudy	Pre-employability program	Part-time employability program/SFI	Student (upgrading)/SFB	Unemployed/SFI (secured reserve funding for Sept for college)
Bonnie	Pre-employability program	Part-time employability program (6 month)/ SFI	Employed (Temporary F-T, ACE)/SFI	Unemployed (new baby), EI
Natalia	Six-month employability program	Full-time employability program (6 month)/ SFI	Unemployed/Child Tax	F-T Employability program, SFB
Carrie	Six-month employability program	Full-Time Employability Program (6 month) /SFI	Part-Time Job/ Job and SFI	Casual/Part-time Job/@ 13.00/hour/ no benefits
Sarah	Six-month employability program	Full-time Employability program (6 month) /SFI	Part-time employment/ Job and SFI	Unemployed/ SFI
Shelley	Six-month employability program	F-T Employability Program (6 month)	Student (university)/ student loan	Unemployed/ social assistance in another province
Melanie	One-year employability program	F-T employability program (1 year)/ SFB	F-T employability program/ SFB	*Employed PT/ SFI*
Loreen	Six-month employability program	FT employability program (6 month)/ SFI	Unemployed/ SFI	Unemployed/SFI
Dana	One-year employability program	FT employability program (one year)/SFB	FT employability program (one year)/SFB	*P-t job (19 hours per week @ $6/hour)*/ SFI
Tamara	One-year employability program	FT employability program (one year)/SFB	FT employability program (one year)/ SFB	Unemployed/ SFI
Mel	One-year employability program	FT employability program (one year)/ SFB	FT employability program (one year)/ SFB	**F-T job, M-F, 7-3, 9.00/hour/ no benefits**
Karen	Independent: Working	P-T job, 4-11/ $8.00 hour/job and SFI	P-T job/ 4-11/job and SFI	**F-T job, shift work (benefits after one year**
Danielle	Independent: Unemployed	Inheritance	Unemployed/SFI	Unemployed/ social assistance in another province
Samantha	Independent: Legal assistant training program,	Training program/SFB	Training program/SFB	**Employed, FT, 7:30-3:30, 22,00/year**
Carla	Independent: Unemployed, looking for work	Unemployed/child tax	PT job/ SFI	*Employed PT job/ job and spouse's income*

Legend: **Bold: Full-time (FT) employment**
Italics: Part-time (P-T) employment
Regular font: SFI/no employment

months. Importantly, his job included intensive physical labour that involved lifting even though he had been on temporary medical leave for back problems one year prior to obtaining this job. Even though it is likely that his employment plan included information on his back problem, somehow he was referred to this job in the job search component of his employability program.

Noteworthy is that two of the four participants that obtained full-time employment, Karen and Samantha, were not in formal employability programs but rather in the group of independents who, although they were required by SFI to find work, found a job or a job-training program on their own. That they were not in employability programs when they obtained full-time jobs suggests that those who found employment may have done so with or without the assistance of the employability programs. Alternatively, they may have been more employment-ready than some of the other participants. The second explanation is somewhat circumspect, however, given than neither of them had graduated from high school, Samantha having a grade 11 education and Karen a grade 9 education, and that one of them had struggled with a drug addiction for years.

The other two participants that found full-time employment, Mel and Pat, were not obligated to find work when they did because they were both on temporary medical leave for back problems upon starting the employability programs. They therefore entered the programs on their own volition. However, although they were on temporary medical leave at the time, this was a designation that would have likely been rescinded within a short time. Nonetheless, their desire to be enrolled in the programs challenges the assumption that people will be on welfare as long as they can. In fact, as I suggested in chapter four, the opposite is true. Most participants indicated that they were eager to leave the welfare rolls. This finding is consistent with several U.S. studies that also found that welfare recipients were eager to work (Edin & Lein, 1996; Monroe & Tiller, 2001; Seccombe et al., 1999). Welfare-to-work offered hope out of poverty and the accompanying stigma and social isolation experienced while on welfare.

Five of 17 of the participants (29%) obtained part-time jobs. Barbara worked as a temporary teacher's aide in an elementary school approximately 25 hours per week. She described this job as positive, but had to reapply for her job every fall, as she was designated as a temporary worker. She was able to leave SFI because she worked a summer job in carnivals which substantially increased her annual income. To do this job, however, she either had to leave her one-year-old son with someone else for the summer, or take him along, which required various informal (and therefore potentially precarious) childcare arrangements. Another participant, Carla, who obtained part-time work was hired by a college as a receptionist working regular hours (12 hours per week for over $13.00 per hour). Although the job did not include benefits, it seemed like it might continue indefinitely. Carla described this job as being very positive because it included flexibility, autonomy and creativity. The third participant, Carrie, obtained a job as a nursing-home attendant. She enjoyed this job and was offered 15 hours a week or more of work at a rate of pay just over $12.00 per hour plus pay for shift differential. The scheduling of the hours of work was difficult, however, because the job entailed shift work and she was on casual status. Thus, she faced challenges with childcare arrangements. Additionally, all three of her children had significant health problems which necessitated that she find time to attend various specialists' appointments.

The fourth person, Dana, obtained a 19 hour per week part-time position, which paid $6.00 per hour, cleaning in her children's daycare. She viewed this position as a dead-end job, and hoped to obtain something better. Melanie, the fifth person in the part-time category, obtained a housekeeping job two days before I conducted my final interview with her. I had some difficulty in reaching her to make the appointment for the final interview, which was unusual. During the final interview I may have discovered why it was difficult to set-up the final interview. I had the sense during the interview that she delayed calling me back until she got this job. I was skeptical about the longevity of this job because she already indicated some problems with her employer, and indicated that she hoped to find a better job. These last three participants were still receiving "supplement-to-earnings" through SFI because their earnings were below the cut-off deemed by SFI as adequate for meeting basic needs.

At the end of the one year transition, there was no change in the employment status for eight out of 17 participants (47%). At the time of the final interview that I conducted with each of the 17 participants, eight were still on social assistance (two who were working part-time as indicated above and two in another province), one was on employment insurance after completing an Alberta Community Employment (ACE) position, and one was receiving no funding but was soon moving onto student-finance funding. Three participants, although they did not obtain work, were starting new training programs at the end of the year in which I interviewed them. One participant, Trudy, who graduated with a high-school equivalency during the year in which I interviewed her, had been accepted into a two year program at a technical school. Another, Natalia, had just started the one year employability program with student-finance funding that a number of other participants had just completed. The third participant, Danielle, was starting a childcare training program in another province. Noteworthy is that two of the participants moving into new programs acknowledged that their motivation for enrolling in the new programs was to receive student-finance funding.

Outcomes in family income

Table 7 details the source and amount of income for each participant throughout the transition from welfare to work. Out of the 17 participants, seven (41%) had an increase in income from the beginning to the end of the year. A few points should be made about these seven participants, however. Loreen's income increased even though she was still on SFI because she had another child move in with her, subsequently increasing her income from social assistance. Carla's earnings increased substantially because she reconciled with her husband and thereby benefited from his earnings in addition to hers. This is not surprising. Marriage is not only a significant factor in assisting women in leaving welfare, but also contributes to increased economic well-being once off welfare (Frenette & Picot, 2003). In fact, in his cross-national comparative study of lone parents, Hunsley (1997) found that marriage was more likely to significantly improve the economic status of lone mothers than employment.

Five of the seven participants had increases from earnings. However, Mel was unsure if his job continued past the summer and Carrie still required an SFI supplement even though her combined earnings and SFI income increased. The two other participants who had increases in earnings, Karen and Penny, only increased their earnings from approximately $900-$1,000 per month on SFI to $1,280 per month working full-time. Three (18%) other participants' amount of income did not change. Interestingly, Samantha obtained a full-time job, but her earnings actually dropped a few dollars from when she left student finance for work. She had self-

Table 7: Self-reported income over one year

Name	Program	Monthly Income (Beginning)	Monthly Income (Middle)	Monthly Income (End)	Change
Penny	One-year employability program	SFI medical 840 + CT 184 = **1024.00**	SFB 1250.00 + maintenance 200.00 + CT 200.00 = **1650.00**	Work 1200.00 + Maint 200 + CT 200 = **1600.00**	**Increase**
Barbara	Part-time pre-employability program	SFI 540 + CT 180 = **720.00**	960 job + maint 165 + CT 208 + 160 (second job = **1493.00**	1200 (two jobs) + main 165 + CT 208 = **1573.00**	**Increase**
Trudy	Part-time pre-employability program	SFI + CT = **1500.00**	Reserve 1700.00 + CT 500 = **2200.00**	SFI + CT = **1500.00**	**Increase/ Decrease**
Bonnie	Part-time pre-employability program	SFI 695 + CT 390 = **1085.00**	ACE + CT = **1230.00**	EI + CT = **1050.00**	**Increase/ decrease**
Natalia	Six-month employability program	SFI 602 + CT 750 + rent paid directly = **1600.00**	CT 700 + Maintenance 200 = **900.00**	Same but soon to get SFB =**900.00**	**Decrease**
Carrie	Six-month employability program	SFI 832 CT 500 = **1332.00**	SFI 450 CT 500 Work 832 = **1800.00**	Work + CT = SFI = **1985.00**	**Increase**
Sarah	Six-month employability program)	SFI 358 + CT 180 plus rent paid direct (212) = **750.00**	Same **750.00**	Same **750.00**	**SAME**
Shelley	Six-month employability program	SFI 652 CT 100 = **752.00**	Student loan **1150.00**	SFI + CT = **835.00**	**Increase/ Decrease**
Melanie	One-year employability program	SFI 700 + CT 200 = **900.00**	SFB 1500.00 + CT 400 = **1900.00**	SFI 966.00 + CT 400 = **1366.00**	**Increase/ Decrease**
Loreen	Six-month employability program	SFI (medical) 875 CT 339 = **1214.00**	Same **1214.00**	SFI 875 CT 500 = **1375.00**	**Increase**
Dana	One-year employability program	SFB + CT 400 = **1670.00**	**SFB** 1103 + work 250 + CT 400 = **1753.00**	Work 400 + CT 400 + 100 maint + SFI 360 = **1260.00**	**Increase/ Decrease**
Tamara	One-year employability program	SFI + CT = **1000.00**	SFB + CT = **1600.00**	SFI 550 + CT 350 = **900.00**	**Increase/ Decrease**
Mel	One-year employability program	SFI 652 CT @184 = **836.00**	SFB + CT (208) = **1343.00**	Job + CT (208) = **1704.00**	**increase**
Karen	Working	Work 600 + SFI 300 = **900.00**	Work + CT 208 **1328.00**	Work + CT 208 **1488.00**	**Increase**
Danielle	Unemployed	SFI + CT = **750.00**	Inheritance (5000.00) (income continually fluctuated due to periodic inheritance payments)	SA (another province) 400 + informal child support 400 (sometimes) + CT 226 = **626.00 -1026.00**	**SAME**
Sam	Legal assistant training program,	SFB 1344 + CT 200 + job 200 = **1744.00**	SFB 1450.00 + CT 208 + job 200 = **1858.00**	Job + pt job + child tax = **1900.00**	**SAME**
Carla	Unemployed, looking for work	Working 600 + CT 500 = **1100.00**	SFI 700 + working 634 + CT 500 = **1834.00**	Combined income (600 = husband) + CT = **1800.00**	**Increase**

7 participants = increase; 4= same; 5 = increase/decrease; 1= decrease

advocated for maximum benefits while on student finance, and even though her job had the highest net annual income of all the participants at $18,000 per year, the take-home pay was slightly less than the student finance income she had been receiving. The other two whose income stayed the same, Sarah and Danielle, were still exclusively receiving social assistance income. Six (35%) participants' incomes increased for six to twelve months during the year I interviewed them (five due to student finance funding and one because of an ACE position), and then decreased again at the end when they did not obtain jobs. One participant's income decreased because she was cut-off of SFI for non-compliance (a term used by SFI for welfare recipients who failed to meet the stipulations of the SFI program) after quitting her employability program. In my last interview with her, she informed me that she had just been approved for student finance so that her income would significantly shift upward within a few weeks.

Not surprisingly, those who obtained employment with a higher wage (the highest incomes reported paid approximately $12 to $13 per hour) were more likely to view the transition from welfare to work as positive whereas those for whom little had changed were more likely to view welfare-to-work less positively. A combination of factors seemed to contribute to their discouragement. First, they did not obtain secure, full-time employment as anticipated when they entered into employability programs. Second, they realized that their future was as precarious now as it was before they started the program. And finally, those who had previously qualified for student finance had come to the end of their term, and now relied on employment income, SFI income, or a combination of the two, which was sometimes less than their student finance income.

Tamara, who was very optimistic about the future at the beginning of the transition, described the difficulty of going back on SFI after being on student finance for a year. Although she had paid several outstanding bills when on student finance, going back onto SFI was very hard for both her and her children.

> Oh it killed me, killed me. You know, I can't, I can't do the things I used to do with the girls. I can't take them out to the movies, or do this, or do that, because there's just no money for it. I can't take them out for a meal because there's no money for it. I mean they suffer too. (W2w021-03)

Melanie, although she obtained a part-time housekeeping job two days before my final interview with her, expressed disillusionment with the welfare-to-work process. She indicated that while she was very optimistic at the beginning of her program, and appreciated the substantial increase in income afforded through student finance, at the end she felt "low" (w2w016-03). Dana, who also obtained a part-time housekeeping job, was disappointed with the outcome of her year, describing it as a "lost year." She indicated that although she learned to write a resume and obtained certificates in first-aid customer-service, the employability program did not help her obtain employment. Sarah, who was never very enthusiastic about welfare-to-work (unlike numerous other participants), indicated that she was no better off after being forced to go through the programs and was bitter because her ex-spouse, who was on SFI medical, received more social assistance income than she did. Danielle, who was unable to find a job, and Shelley, who did one year of university on a student loan, eventually left the province in pursuit of a better life elsewhere. When I last spoke to them, they were on social assistance in a different province.

In summary, neither the pressure to find work, nor the employability programs served as magic bullets to propel welfare recipients into work. However, there was some movement into employment for participants. Although a few of the jobs appeared promising in terms of providing job security and a living wage, others appeared to be dead-end jobs. Forty-seven percent of the participants were still on social assistance (two in another province) upon conclusion of my study, and one participant was not receiving any formal funding.

"Supplement to earnings" and "earnings exemptions"

Relevant to the economic outcomes of participants were the SFI policies for "supplement to earnings," which provided monetary income supplements to welfare recipients who held jobs but needed additional funds to meet their basic needs, and SFI policies about "earnings exemptions," which outlined how much income a welfare recipient could earn before SFI benefits were decreased (AFSS, 1993, 02-02, p. 1; 02-07, p. 2). Welfare recipients who required earnings supplements were "expected to keep the job they have, and to become as self-sufficient as possible. Clients who have the ability are expected to increase their earnings by working more hours and/or finding a job with a higher rate of pay" (02-02, p. 1). Conversely, earning exemptions penalized welfare recipients if they earned too much income, thereby reducing the SFI benefit levels accordingly. Notably, the phrasing of this policy is cast in a positive light.

> People can work while receiving Income Support. This increases their total income and provides valuable work experience. When people receive ongoing financial assistance, they keep all of their wages, and only a portion of their employment earnings are taken into account when their benefits are calculated. This is called an earnings exemption (AHRE, 2004a).

At the beginning of this study, participants had earnings exemptions of 100% on the first $175 of market income, plus 25% of additional earnings. Recognizing that this posed as a barrier to seeking work, the Ministry of Alberta Human Resources and

Employment increased the initial 100% earnings exemption to $230 dollars, and continued to maintain a 25% exemption on any additional earnings (AHRE 2004a). Interestingly, the SFI Policy Manual (1990) acknowledges that SFI benefits are reduced in equal amounts provided by the National Child Benefit to enable the provincial government to provide additional benefits to low-income families, including greater earnings exemptions for welfare recipients (AFSS, 1993, 01-02, p 1). The policies for "supplement to earnings" and "earnings exemptions" resonate with the expression "robbing Paul to pay Peter". These policies are essentially two-sides of the same coin. In the first instance, working poor are given a supplement, and in the second, welfare recipients' earnings were clawed-back. To the participants themselves, these policies were indistinguishable, and caused considerable frustration.

Carla shared a story about when she was receiving an income supplement from SFI to support her employment of 25 hours per week at a wage rate of $6.25 per hour. She recalled that her SFI worker informed her that she needed to find a job that paid more money. Her reaction to this statement was that she didn't need to be told that -- she already knew it. Conversely, Sarah, in describing her experience with obtaining work while on social assistance, recalls how the earnings exemption left her no better off while working. Sarah's story illustrates clearly how the earnings exemption/income supplement policies impacted the day-to-day lives of participants, and points to a critique of the concept of self-sufficiency.

A 40-year old woman with a two year old child, Sarah had a lengthy employment record working as a cook in oil camps. She went onto SFI when she became pregnant with her daughter. At that time she broke her foot, and needed to be on bed rest throughout much of her pregnancy. After her daughter was born, she was unable to return to her previous job, as it required living in isolated locations for much of the year. In addition, she developed a chronic back injury, which precluded her from doing the heavy work required in her previous job. A few months after I met Sarah, she obtained a job as a short-order cook working in a cafeteria. She worked five days a week, five hours a day, making $7.00 per hour, $1.10 per hour above minimum wage. She grossed approximately $700 per month. She had to travel via public transportation a total of three hours per day (one and a half hours each way) to get to her job. Her daughter was therefore in daycare a full day, even though Sarah only worked five hours per day. She worked at this job for a number of months until she was laid-off. This job was temporary because Sarah had been an interim worker during a strike and when the strike was resolved, Sarah's job was terminated. Sarah's experience fits with Klein and Montgomery's (2001) finding that welfare reform provides a surplus labour supply for low-skill employment.

Even though Sarah had a lengthy employment history, earned more than minimum wage in her current job, and put-in a full day working, commuting to work, and transporting her child to and from daycare, she was not economically better off than when her sole income was derived from social assistance. She indicated that this was largely due to the SFI income exemption policy. For instance, one month she received an income-supplement cheque from SFI for a total of $9.00, because of the $700 of gross income she was making in her job. Despite the fact that Sarah was able to obtain a position that fit within the boundaries of subsidized daycare availability, which is rare for a low-income worker, she did not earn enough in this position to meet her needs, and the SFI income supplement was so minimal that it did nothing to enhance her income. Furthermore, she did not have any job security, evidenced by her lay-off. The goal of self-sufficiency remained elusive, despite substantial effort.

Discussion of economic outcomes

Using the Low Income Measure (LIM) equivalency formula[9], I calculated the Market Basket Measure for the most common family types in my study: a single parent with one child, and a single parent with two children. Because of the criticisms of relative measures such as the LICOs, I chose to use the MBM to demonstrate that even with a direct measure of poverty, the problem of poverty continues for the majority of welfare leavers. A comparison of the MBM, SFI rates, average incomes for Canadians, and incomes from my sample is telling. As shown in Table 8, according to the MBM, a single parent with one child required $16,684 to meet basic needs in the year 2002, and a single parent with two children required $20,534 to meet basic needs. In 2002, SFI income combined with the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) for a lone parent with one child under 12 was $11, 352. For a single parent with two children, the SFI

Table 8 Income Comparisons

Household type	**SFI**	**MBM (2002)**	**LICO (after tax) (2002)**	**Highest market income in this study**	**Average Canadian Income**
Single parent, one child under 12	$11, 352	$16, 684	$ 19, 410	$22, 200 (gross) $18,000 (after tax), $20,400 (after tax & transfers)	$28,100 (gross)
Single parent, two children	$13, 200	$20, 534	$24, 550		
Coupled family					61, 200 (gross)

Source: Statistics Canada, 2004; National Council of Welfare, 2004 income plus the CCTB and NCBS in Alberta in the same time period was approximately $13, 200 annually. As such, SFI rates in Alberta in 2002 were approximately 30% lower than the MBM (National Council of Welfare, 2004).

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[9] The low income measure (LIM) is calculated by using an adult as one unit, a second adult as .4, and a child as .3 (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2004).

Samantha, a single mother with one child, attained the highest net market income for my sample at $18, 000 per year. With the additional income from the CCTB and the NCBS of approximately $2,400, to make a total income of $20, 400, this income is 122% of the MBM income of $16,684, or 115% of the after-tax LICO at $19, 410 (National Council of Welfare, 2002). Compared to income derived from social assistance, the CCTB, NCBS and GST to total $11, 352 per year, $20, 400 was significantly higher – almost twice that of a social assistance income. Samantha's success in almost doubling her income through labour-market attachment could be used to support the argument that welfare leavers are better-off working. However, Samantha's case is noteworthy more for its demonstration of the inadequacy of SFI income than for a rationale to support welfare-to-work initiatives. Moreover, Samantha's ability to increase her income beyond the MBM was an exception rather than the norm in my sample of participants.

The majority of the participants in my study did not surpass the MBM, even with earned income. Five of the 17 participants had incomes above the MBM, and 12 had incomes below the MBM upon the conclusion of the study. Not surprisingly, the group whose income surpassed the MBM consisted of the four participants who obtained full-time employment. The fifth participant, Barbara, came in above the MBM by about $2,000 because of a seasonal summer job, which augmented her part-time employment. Importantly, only two participants had *earned income* above the MBM. The other three would have fallen on or below the MBM without the Canada Child Tax Benefit of approximately $2,400 per year. Furthermore, it must be noted that my calculations were done based on their last reported monthly income. My analysis of whether their income surpassed the MBM assumes that they will maintain that income throughout the year, which is circumspect.

That the other participants' income did not exceed the MBM is related to a combination of wage rates and numbers of hours worked. A single parent with one child needs to earn a net hourly wage of $8.00, 40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year, to meet the MBM and a single parent with two children needs to earn a net hourly wage of $9.87, 40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year, to meet the MBM. Although the participants received wages ranging from $6.00 per hour to $13.00 per hour, most of the participants who obtained jobs made less than $10.00 hourly. Furthermore, most did not obtain full-time work, which is consistent with what is known about the realities of the low-wage market. Full-time employment is increasingly scarce, and non-standard work is increasingly common, characterized by insecure, temporary, seasonal work with irregular hours, no benefits, and no union protection (Armstrong, 1996; Jenson, 1996; Vosko, 1999). Hence, it is not surprising that participants continued to live in poverty, even if they obtained jobs. These findings are consistent with other research documenting the realities of those leaving the welfare rolls (Cancian & Meyer, 2000; Elton et al., 1997; Frenette & Picot, 2003; Harris, 1996; Edin & Lein, 1996; Michalopoulos, Tattrie, et al., 2002; Shillington, 1998). Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) show that after the income subsidy ended, 80% of participants in both the program and control groups were living below the LICOs (Michalopoulos, Tattrie, et al., 2002).

Although only one of the participants in my study experienced a decrease in income, most had little or no significant change in earnings. The findings of my study indicate that even though SFI rates were clearly not sufficient to meet a family's needs, neither was market-derived income. Although earnings did increase overall monthly income for some participants, this was not enough to raise incomes above the MBM for the majority. Furthermore, although the highest market income in my study was almost double the SFI rate, and substantially higher than the MBM, it was still dismally low when compared to the average family income in Canada, even an average lone-parent income. Across Canada, the median family income for Canadian couple families in 2002 was $61,200. Comparatively, the median income for families in Edmonton was $63,400, and for lone-parent families was $31,000 (Statistics Canada, May 26, 2004). The implication is that welfare-to-work participants continue to live with comparatively minimal income within an affluent society.

It could be argued that although participants currently have low paying and/or part-time work, this work could lead to full-time employment. In fact, this is an explicit assumption of welfare-to-work (Alberta Human Resources & Employment, 2002), as indicated in chapter two. Current Canadian research disputes this claim, however, and shows the gender differences in the notion of "moving up the ladder." Janz (2004) used data from the national Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics to track the changes in jobs for workers who were in low-paid work in 1996. She found that fewer than 50% of employees with low-paid work in 1996 had moved out of it by 2001. Moreover, Janz noted that 41% of women were low-paid workers in 1996, which was almost twice that of men at 22%. Not surprisingly, Janz found that those who moved out of low-paying jobs were more likely to be young, university educated males who worked in professional or industrial occupations. Conversely, older women with a high-school education or less were least likely to move out of low-paying work. Findings from Janz's study suggest that participants in my study are unlikely to move out of poverty through employment. Yet labour-market attachment remains the panacea to welfare dependency in current policy thinking. With the continued emphasis on labour-market attachment, economic inequality is likely to increase with particular repercussions for women. In chapter seven, I will return to this point to consider the health implications of economic inequality. In the next section, I detail non-economic impacts of welfare-to-work, showing the unpaid work involved on the edges of a paid work day, including childcare arrangements, and the day-to-day scheduling and organizing involved.

The work outside the work

Conventional examinations of welfare states have used a class-based analysis to determine the impacts of welfare policies on labour markets and wages (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1996). Although this is valuable information, it leaves out other vital information on the juncture between employment in the labour market and family care. In order to understand the impacts of welfare policies more fully, feminists argue that it is necessary to consider the linkages between the family, the state and the market (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Daly, 2000; Lewis, 2000; O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999). A corollary of this approach is that the invisible nature of family-care work is made visible.

There is a significant body of research that documents the amount of work involved in raising children and maintaining employment in the labour market, particularly for women. In a landmark study, Hochschild (1990) found that women perform a "second shift" of work in the home in addition to their paid labour. In an earlier study, Pleck (1977) found that it is generally assumed that women will disrupt their paid work for childcare responsibilities, and that men will disrupt their families for paid work responsibilities. Current research suggests that this trend continues today. In Canada, working women with pre-schoolers missed 3.4 days of work per year to conduct childcare responsibilities compared to half that time for their male counterparts, showing that the presence of pre-school children "exerts a strong influence on work absences for personal or family responsibilities, especially for women" (Statistics Canada, 1999. p. 8).

Most of the research done on work/family balance documents the experiences of middle-class women. Less is known about the experiences of low-income mothers attempting to balance work and family. Studies available on low-income working mothers suggest that the findings about middle-class experiences cannot be generalized to low-income women as the experiences of low-income employed mothers may be more complex (Smith 2002; Solomon 2001). Balancing paid work and unpaid family work for low-income parents brings additional challenges. For instance, low-wage jobs often entail shift work, requiring more complex "after-hour" childcare arrangements. Furthermore, low-income parents may not have access to goods and services that make balancing work and family more feasible such as laundry facilities, a dishwasher, a microwave, a vacuum cleaner or a vehicle. Finally, low-income work does not normally entail flexibility or autonomy, which impacts a persons' ability to balance work and family. Hence, although women still do a disproportionate amount of caring work regardless of socio-economic status, the burdens of low-income single parent families are that much greater. Edin and Lein (1996) came to the conclusion that low-income work was often incompatible with parenting.

"Day-to-Night": Personal Vignette

March 9, 2004 (Morghan's age: 5 1/2 months)

It's Monday morning. This is supposedly my first 'real, full-time' work week as my baby, Morghan, is now in full-time daycare. We (my husband, our baby and myself) roll out of bed at 8:57 am, exhausted. We've just survived what we've declared as 'our worst weekend ever'. For the past month or so our daughter has been waking up every two hours each night. We've been calling it a phase, a growth spurt, reciting the old adage, 'this too shall pass'. Since starting daycare she's picked-up her first cold and her nighttime waking frequency has now increased to 30 minute intervals. Last night was a killer. Every time she fell asleep, she woke up again, congested, frustrated and crying. I got the stomach flu yesterday (also circulating around daycare) and Eric has managed to pick-up a cold. Eric looks at the clock and states lethargically, 'how do people with real jobs do this'? Slightly defensively, I retort, 'people with real jobs still have another 6 months mat leave.' I need to believe we are heroes for accomplishing this great task of work and childcare with such a young baby.

In feminist inquiry, the personal experience of the researcher can contribute to the dialogue that occurs between the research interviewer and participant. The exploration of work and family balance in this study is one area where personal experience could have contributed to data enrichment. However, due to the timing, this did not happen. Dorothy Smith (1998) discusses the importance of gathering the everyday/every night experiences of participants to explicate their connections to larger social processes. It was not until September, 2003, when I gave birth to a baby girl, that I understood why, perhaps, Smith also included the "every night". Although the experience of having a child has brought more joy than I imagined possible, it has also been more demanding and, at times, exhausting than I was prepared for. The presence of my baby has necessitated a significant change in schedule, routine, time management, and personal goals. I include this small piece of my own story here because this personal experience has enriched my understanding of the stories that participants shared with me -- despite the differences in other aspects of our life experiences. Had I conducted my interviews after having a child, I would have asked more specific questions about the "day-to-night" experiences of attempting to secure labour-market attachment and raising small children with their 24-hour demands. Nonetheless, I have documented information about the day-to-day work involved outside of the employment-related activity, and explore these findings below, showing that participants experienced considerable challenges with balancing paid work and unpaid family work, including childcare organization and subsidy, and the day-to-day management of the actualities of their families' lives.

Work/family balance

Although it is clear that participants were eager to work and found the employability programs worthwhile (even if the experiences of the outcomes were diverse), their experiences of the welfare-to-work transition were more complex than simply their experience of going to school, searching for employment or working. Because all of the participants in this study had at least one pre-school child, looking for work or going to school involved a significant amount of invisible daily work and planning which caused them considerable stress, anxiety and fatigue. Addressing childcare needs and the day-to-day challenge of getting themselves and their children out of the door in the morning and back home in the evening proved taxing and exhausting at times. In short, many of the participants, although enthusiastic about employment, struggled with work/family balance.

Participants were cognizant of the reality of the low-wage labour market[10], and recognized that finding a job that would fit with their family demands could be difficult. Several participants had past experiences in which they were fired from jobs due to work/family conflicts. Trudy, for instance, described how she had a job as a chambermaid in a hotel working days. She explained to her employer that she could only work day shifts on week days, but one day he requested that she come in on a weekend. She was unable to make the shift due to childcare constraints and was subsequently fired from the position (w2w005). Similarly, Mel described the incompatibility of work and childcare in a previous job. After working for two and a half years at a large grocery chain stocking shelves, he was fired. His shift began at 4:00 am, which he was able to manage until he took sole custody of his two-year-old daughter. Thereafter he could not commence work that early in the morning because he was unable to find childcare at this time of day (w2w022).

Danielle, who had held a full-time job for a number of years as a check-out clerk in a grocery chain before having her daughter, described the frustrations of trying to obtain full-time work that fit with her childcare requirements. She had already gone through an employability program when I met her, gone back onto SFI and was now going through a new cycle of looking for work. She described a prior experience at the end of her last employability program. She was unable to find a job, and considered relocating to another province. She decided against this in the end because she was told by her SFI worker that if she did that her file would be red-flagged if she were to ever return. So, she decided to again try obtaining employment locally:

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[10] Earlier I referenced Vosko (1999) who suggests that one of the underlying goals of employability programs is to teach welfare recipients to accept the precarious nature of the labour market.

> So I, I thought okay, I better start looking for another job, a job. So I changed my focus from the food industry to, um, well I was looking more or less for anything. Anything to do with customer service or retail, they always want you evenings and weekends. I tried to find a babysitter to commit. I checked a few people and nobody wanted to commit three or four nights a week, weekends. They'll help me out but they don't want to commit (W2w-014).

To address the incompatibility of work hours and childcare availability, Danielle, like numerous other participants, chose to limit her job search to positions with work hours during a regular work day within a regular work week. Danielle described how after she discovered that all service jobs required shift work and that she was unable to secure childcare, she decided to "be firm" and only look for daytime work. Similar to several other participants, Danielle determined that the only realistic work she would be able to get was secretarial or receptionist work. However, Danielle, like others, soon discovered that office work was relatively scarce and required computer skills that she did not have.

In addition to finding work that was compatible with childcare needs, participants considered carefully how an irregular schedule might impact their children negatively and tried to find work that would entail a routine schedule. In the segment below, Trudy describes her strategy for job search, demonstrating her concern for her children.

> I'm taking my time to get a good paying job, not just MacDonald's paying job. I know a lot of jobs nowadays are shift work and I can't. I would, but I just don't want to for my kids' sake. Sure I can work from 8:30 in the morning till 4 or 4:30 in the afternoon. I can work all day. But there is a lot of jobs out there that don't have that. They don't have the day schedule, shift work. Sure my kids can be in daycare. I can take shift work for 6 hours from 12 - 6 but it won't be. It can't. I'll have them in the daycare from noon to 4 or 4:30. After that I'd have to take time off to go and pick them up and then you have to get back my shift would be over. It would just be chaos. I don't want to think of it. Cause my kids would be all fumbled here and there and it would be frustrating cause I have 4 kids and they would be stressed right out too. So I kinda think about how they're gonna feel too. What I'm putting them through. I think about them a lot. I do care about my kids and how they feel.

> How they are gonna feel about the whole situation. Are they gonna like it or are they not gonna like it (w2w005-03).

Worrying about the well-being of their children was a significant consideration in finding suitable employment.

The illustrations above highlight the complication that childcare needs created for participants as they engaged in job search. Previous research has clearly shown that childcare provisions are paramount if welfare recipients with children are required to find and maintain employment (Edin & Lein, 1996; Meyers, 1997). However, the findings of this study suggest that even with childcare provisions, significant barriers to employment arose for participants.

Of the 17 participants in this study, all had their children in full-time, licensed daycare facilities at some point during data collection, and most for the entire duration of the study. All participants had a full-time subsidy during the time that they were in an employability program or working. Most of the participants chose their daycares for location and availability. Two participants carefully chose daycares for quality; subsequently, one of them, Samantha, paid an extra $277 above and beyond the subsidized limit to ensure her child was in a high-quality not-for-profit daycare. She advocated for herself to get extra funding from the Student Finance Board to be able to pay the extra cost.

Most participants were originally hesitant about leaving their children in daycares because they worried about how their children would function in someone else's care. Eventually they became comfortable with leaving their children with others, however, and reported that their children were doing well. Participants indicated that their children benefited from the social interaction, the structure, and the activities available in daycare. One benefit reported as a result of daycare was a noticeable improvement in child development. Dana, for instance, indicated that her children's language skills improved significantly after being in daycare for awhile.

These findings are not surprising, as previous research has shown that low-income children benefit significantly from quality childcare. Criteria upon which quality childcare is based include low ratios between caregivers and children, educated staff with specialized training, and facilities that provide a stimulating environment (Howes, Phillips, & Whitebook, 1992; Kohen, Hertzman & Willms, 2002). These characteristics distinguish simple custodial care from care which focuses on child development. Child development research finds that quality care is linked to "linguistic, cognitive and social competencies of infants" (Kohen, Hertzman & Willms 2002, p. 263). Furthermore, consistent with Dana's observation that her children's language skills improved, Canadian research has shown that low-income children who attend childcare facilities have better vocabulary skills than low-income children who do not attend childcare facilities (Kohen, Hertzman, Willms, 2002).

In addition to positive experiences, a few participants in this study identified problems with childcare centres. Some concerns were reported about childcare quality, such as infrequent diaper changes (Melanie), unease with how children were treated -- although this was unspecified (Natalia), and childcare schedules that were not sensitive to a child's individual needs (Tamara). Some participants struggled with childcare arrangements due to the special needs of their children, one participant's child being expelled from childcare for continued behavioural problems. On balance, issues with formal childcare arrangements were minimal compared to the positive outcomes of having children in daycare settings. Despite the problems noted, parents were generally positive about their daycare experiences. Challenges with childcare arrangements, however, emerged in the data, showing important considerations when critically analyzing seemingly reasonable policies.

Childcare subsidy

In Alberta the average cost for a spot in a childcare centre is $523 per month (Doherty, Friendly & Beach, 2003). Recognizing that childcare concerns are a significant barrier to employment, the Alberta government provides full childcare subsidies for low-income parents, including those moving from welfare to work. Low-income families are eligible for subsidies of up to $475 for a child between zero and nineteen months, and $380 for a child 19 months or older (Government of Alberta, 2002a). Welfare recipients are eligible for full subsidies if they are actively engaged in welfare-to-work activities, which may include attending an employability program or working. However, childcare subsidies are not given to those who are looking for work, although some study participants were able to access limited funds for babysitting through their financial benefits worker. If parents choose childcare that costs more than the subsidy amount (i.e., more than $475 for a full subsidy), they are required to pay the difference, which is referred to as the parent portion. However, for welfare recipients, this parent portion can be paid through the SFI program if the person meets the eligibility requirements. This policy demonstrates recognition of the limitation that childcare needs place on welfare recipients as they attempt to engage in paid work, and attempts to fill this gap. Theoretically, this policy seems client-centered, and cognizant of the needs of welfare recipients as they attempt to secure adequate employment. However, the experiences of welfare recipients in procuring employment highlight some significant shortcomings in this policy.

Below is an excerpt from an interview with Samantha which highlights a number of key issues that low-income parents face when looking for quality childcare.

> Like I wanted a quality daycare where he's going to learn and grow, and prosper. And that is something, like that really bothers me, is that the daycares out here aren't, like you have to pay money to get into a good daycare. ***So if you're a low income person, you get a low income daycare, and that sucks because children are worth it.*** Children are worth a high quality daycare, all of them, they should all be high quality daycares. There should not be, you know, one better than the other. Like it's not right that a single mother or a single father, a single parent, or a low income family, has to choose a shitty daycare. It just pisses me off... They're not being shown how to grow or prosper in any kind of way because they can't afford any better for their child. So what's going to happen to those children? They're not going to learn very well, are they? They're not going to grow up in a healthy environment, they're not even getting a good chance to start out in life. You know, why is that, that some daycares are better than others? (emphasis added).... (w2w017).

In the quotation above, Samantha suggested that childcare accessibility and quality are hinged upon ability to pay. An examination of childcare costs in Edmonton suggests that this is indeed the case.

Theoretically, childcare subsidies sound like a good idea. If a person has a low income, presumably a childcare subsidy would help a parent to seek and maintain employment. Arguments aside about whether or not the primary caregivers of young children should be required to engage in paid work, childcare subsidies seem to be a key step in removing barriers to employment for welfare recipients with young children. Yet an analysis of childcare costs reveals that childcare subsidy does not come close to addressing the costs of childcare. The University Infant Toddler Centre, purported to be one of the best childcare centres in Edmonton, costs $891 per month for a child under 19 months. In addition to having a waiting list which can require a parent to wait up to one year to gain access to the centre, a person would have to pay an additional $416, even with a full subsidy, in order to pay for the childcare spot. For low-income parents, this parent portion is prohibitive. Although SFI and student finance may cover the parent portion, findings from my study suggest that this was not a foregone conclusion as some parents paid the parent portion while others did not. Furthermore, using the University Infant Toddler Centre again as an illustration, it is noteworthy that of the 43 childcare spots at this daycare, only one was subsidized. This was not a decision of the daycare as the procedure for subsidy approval occurs independently from the daycare admission process. That parents qualifying for childcare subsidy did not attempt to get their children enrolled in this daycare lends some credibility to the hypothesis that low-income parents are more likely to access childcare centres that cost less. Samantha's claim that low-income parents get low-income childcare, then, seems to have merit.

A poignant illustration shared by Carla, a participant in this study, shows that even when childcare subsidy covers most of the costs, childcare expenses can still be prohibitive for low-income workers. Carla, a mother of three children, is in her mid-thirties. When I met her she had a part-time retail job in which she worked five hours per day, five days per week at an hourly wage of $6.25 per hour. She thus earned a daily income of $31.25 per day, or $155.25 per week before deductions. She was not collecting social assistance when she worked at this job because she did not want to go back onto assistance. Carla's oldest two children were in daycare, for which she received a large subsidy, but still had to pay $2.00 per day per child. Her youngest child was too young to qualify for daycare, so she stayed with a relative, whom Carla paid $15.00 per day. So, Carla's total childcare costs, with subsidy, came to $19.00 per day, or $380 per month. For three pre-school children, this is inexpensive childcare. However, after paying childcare costs, Carla had a $12.25 of market income left over, before deductions, or approximately $10.00 per day (or $200 per month) of net market income. Childcare costs, even with a significant subsidy for two children, cost Carla two-thirds of her total market income.

Other problems with childcare accessibility emerged in this study as Karen's story illustrates. Karen is a young mother who managed to find employment for 25 hours per week at a retail store at $6.00 per hour. During the year that I had contact with Karen, she continued in this job and eventually worked 40 hours per week, increasing her wage to $8.00 per hour. She had a full subsidy for her childcare. However, her hours of work were from 4:00 pm to 12:00 am four weekdays, and one weekend day per week. The daycare was only open from 6:00 am until 6:00 pm. So, the subsidized childcare that she qualified for only partially met her childcare needs. Karen, unlike many others, was able to find a solution. Her mother, with whom she lived, picked-up her son from daycare, and cared for him in the evening. Karen came home from work, had something to eat, wound down, and went to bed at approximately 1:00 am. Because she had to rise with her one-year old son early in the morning, she was constantly sleep deprived.

Furthermore, the childcare subsidy policy stipulated that Karen must have her son in childcare 25 hours per week to quality for the subsidy, which is 5 hours per weekday (the daycare was not open on the weekend). So, Karen took her son to daycare earlier than she needed to, and on the weekday that she has off work, in order to qualify for the subsidy. She did not pay her mother for her childcare contribution. The stipulations of the subsidy that her son be present 25 hours per week thus required that he was in daycare when his mother could have cared for him. Furthermore, it only covered 3 hours per day, or 12 hours out of the 25 to 40 hours that Karen actually worked.

Karen's situation points to a pitfall in the childcare subsidy policy. Full-time subsidy is offered to parents who require a minimum of 100 childcare hours per month. Part-time subsidy is offered to parents who need between 50-100 hours of childcare per month. If parents hold a full-time subsidy, they are required to use the daycare centre a minimum of 100 hours per month. If they fall short of the 100 hours per month, the subsidy program may prorate their payment to the daycare for the hours the subsidized child attended. For instance, if a child is subsidized for $475 per month, and he/she only attends 50 hours that month rather than 100, the daycare may only get paid for 50 hours, or $237.50. Yet the daycare expenses remain the same as the staff and operating costs continue. The director of the University Infant Toddler Centre said that one way to deal with this is to ask the family to submit a doctor's note each time the child misses daycare. Holiday time could become a problem as a participant may miss a number of weeks in a month, thereby missing the number of required attendance hours significantly (Director of the University Infant Toddler Centre, Personal Communication, August, 2004). Although the participants of my study did not qualify for or take vacation time in the year I interviewed them, it is possible that those with stable employment could eventually encounter this problem.

Karen's childcare situation is a good example of how a policy can appear to be client-centered on paper but fall short in real-life situations. In this case, the fully-subsidized childcare only covered one-quarter to one-third of her childcare needs. Consequently, her mother made a significant commitment to providing childcare every evening and the weekend-day that Karen worked. Still, Karen was chronically exhausted because her work hours, which went late, conflicted with her son's schedule, which entailed rising early in the morning.

One more situation that emerged in this study reveals the limitations of childcare policies. Carrie, a 33-year old woman with 3 children, was hired as a part-time care assistant in a nursing home, making $12.00 per hour plus shift differential. Carrie started work at 7:00 am. In order to be at work on time, she caught the bus at 6:20 am. However, the daycare that her children attended did not open until 6:30 am. To deal with this time lapse, Carrie walked with her children to a nearby gas station at 6:15 am. Her children went into the gas station store to wait, and Carrie caught the 6:20 am bus. At 6:30 am, when the daycare opened, her children walked on their own across the parking lot to the daycare. If Carrie worked evenings or weekends, she had a friend, the son of a friend, or her abusive ex-husband care for her children. Even though Carrie had a full-time subsidy and enrollment in a daycare only a short walk from her residence, she still encountered roadblocks to ensuring that her children arrived there safely. Carrie's situation, created by policies requiring her to sustain employment, necessitated that she take some risks in order to arrive at work on time.

Childcare subsidy policy is problematic for parents, daycares, and the healthcare system. First, it adds further surveillance and stigma to the subsidized client. Parents without subsidy pay for their daycare spot, and use this spot as it suits them. Conversely, subsidized parents are required to use the spot for a minimal number of hours or risk penalty. Second, current policy penalizes the daycare if the child misses hours. This may cause the daycare to be less enthusiastic about accepting subsidized parents. It also makes daycares difficult to operate as the expenses stay the same whether the subsidy program pays them or not. In Alberta, 86.6% of the expenditures for regulated daycare spaces are paid by childcare fees (paid either out of pocket by parents or through the childcare subsidy program)

(Doherty et al., 2003). If daycare subsidy threatens or does not pay the daycare for a child who is enrolled full-time even if they didn't attend full-time, this is problematic for the daycare operation. Third, and most importantly, this policy demonstrates a lack of understanding about the reality of those requiring subsidized daycare. Given that low-income workers are more likely to work part-time, shift work in temporary jobs with rotating schedules, they require a full-time subsidy because they can not predict when they will have to work. A part-time subsidy would only give a parent access to specific days of the week. For instance, daycares that provide part-time spots require the child to attend either Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, or Tuesdays and Thursdays. This regimented schedule, integral for the survival of the daycare, clashes with the needs of the parent who may work irregular hours. Furthermore, requiring a doctor's note each time a child misses daycare for illness is an unnecessary expense to the healthcare system. Sometimes children may be sick, but do not require a doctor's visit. This necessarily creates a trip to the doctor which is time-consuming for parents, and is inconsistent with concerns about over-use of the healthcare system.

The stories above illustrate the disconnect between the realities of low-income work and childcare policies designed to remove the barrier to employment for low-income parents. Using a "dynamic systems perspective," Yoshikawa and Hsueh (2001) argue that it is important to look at how various systems are connected. Interestingly, to illustrate their point, they use an example of childcare similar to the examples above to show how a potentially positive anti-poverty program can have negative effects through interaction with the childcare system. They point out that changing employment status of low-income workers is common and that if childcare subsidies are based on the necessity of working full-time, these systems necessarily interact. When hours change – which is common amongst low-income workers – this requires a change in childcare arrangements. Increased stress is potentially brought upon the parents to hastily make arrangements so as to not lose childcare subsidy and consequently increased harm is potentially brought to children through constantly changing childcare. The childcare system and the employment system, in this case, interact to impact the family in poverty. If policy makers recognized the interaction between these systems, and created policies which considered the interplay between the systems, clients would benefit. However, to do this, a careful analysis of the realities of the people who are affected must be executed. Regrettably, this analysis often does not occur before policies are implemented, as my findings illustrate.

"Pitching hay": The day-to-day grind

In addition to childcare challenges, the work outside the work involved considerable organization of day-to-day activities. Attending employability programs or working required a carefully planned routine which offered both benefits and drawbacks to the day-to-day schedules of participants and their families. On the one hand, participants described how attending employability programs or working improved their family-functioning by providing structure in their days. On the other hand, the carefully executed schedule could be exhausting, and at times overwhelming.

Participants were required to organize their days into regular routines which got themselves and their children out of bed and out of the house in the morning. Many of them suggested that this was positive for the day-to-day functioning of their families, as well as positive for their mental health. Additionally, several participants indicated that having purpose, routine, and structure in their daily lives impacted how their children viewed them, enhancing their children's well-being. Trudy, for example indicated:

> I think my kids look more up to me. When I'm doing something they feel good…Like their whole world revolves around me. And then when I break down, or have a stressing day or something, they feel it, eh? They feel like something's wrong with mom (w2w005-02).

Trudy, among others, recognized that her mental health impacted her children's mental health. Similar to findings from empirical research (Smith et al., 2000; Jackson et al., 2000), Trudy understood that children's well-being hinged upon their parents' well-being. Interestingly, policy makers have often overlooked this fact, often focusing on child well-being without considering parental well-being (Beauvais & Jenson, 1999).

In addition to improved well-being, some participants felt that they were better role models for their children because of their involvement in labour-market activities. Natalia described this sentiment:

> [M]y kids… they're looking up to me more, not like a bump, you know, not like someone who is not going to do anything with their life. And that's how I was feeling because Robin was saying things like, you know, we're poor and we never have money, things like that… Because I mean I can't see a child looking up to somebody who's not doing something with their life. Now I have something, I'm doing something, I can see my kids look up to me better and they're listening better (w2w010-03).

This finding is consistent with another qualitative study that found that welfare recipients viewed employment as an important characteristic of being a good role model for their children (Monroe & Tiller, 2001).

A regimented schedule, although providing structure that seemed to improve children's behaviour, entailed much organization and planning that could be exhausting. Getting to school or work required substantial morning work. Many participants described getting up very early, some as early as 5:00 am if they had to start work by 7:00 am, to prepare themselves and their children for the day. Most did not have to provide their children with breakfast or a packed lunch because daycares provided these meals, which was very helpful. However, children still had to get up, get dressed, and out the door to either walk or catch a bus to daycare. After dropping off their children at daycare, parents would then proceed to school or work, which for most entailed a relatively long bus ride. At the end of a work day, the transportation routine was reversed. Parents took the bus to their children's daycare, picked-up the children, and then either walked or took the bus home. Upon arriving home, they cooked supper, prepared clothing for the following day, and went to bed, some as early as 7:00 pm. Similar to many other participants, Samantha described her schedule:

> And there are days that I'm tired, I'm so tired working. Like I'm up at 5:30 and then I go to bed at 10:00, and then I roll around because its so damn hot, you know. But I'm up at 5:30, my son gets up at 6:30, I'm out the door by 7:00, and then at work at my desk at 7:30. I'm lucky if I get out of there by quarter to four, or 3:30 you know, I'm out and go get Jimmy. He wants to walk home, because he wants to walk everywhere now. We get home, I've got to cook supper, like I'm just burned out…It's hard to be a working single mom (w2w017-03).

Most indicated that there was little time for anything else besides absolutely necessary chores such as meal preparation and clean-up, baths and organizing for the following day. The demands of the children could be difficult at the end of a long day. Bonnie described her typical evening struggle:

> And then I leave work at 4:30, go pick up the kids, bring them home… and I say, "Okay you guys, you've gotta let me lay down for a little while." And Adam has said, "I'm hungry, I'm hungry, I'm hungry, I'm hungry, I'm hungry." Three times before I've even sat down or he's talking about a project he wants to do or and I'm like: "Adam, give me a break here." (w2w006-02).

Other participants who were attending school indicated that they had to do some homework after their children went to bed, which could be very tiring. The schedules, in short, were relentless and exhausting.

Weekends for many entailed doing laundry and grocery shopping. Recreational activities were modest for most, and included watching television, playing Nintendo, listening to music, going for coffee, playing games with their children or going to the park. Some participants used fee-reduction cards to access recreational facilities to go swimming or to register their children in city programs. There was little energy, time, or money for much else. When asked about recreation, Sarah stated succinctly: "I can't afford to recreate" (w2w015-03).

The relentless routine before and after work with little to no recreational time, took its toll. Many participants described having less patience with their children, yelling at them more often, which they attributed to fatigue (w2w002; w2w004; w2w005; w2w006; w2w007; w2w014; w2w015; w2w017; w2w021). Some felt that their children were more "clingy," "possessive," or "cuddly" because they did not have as much time with their mother (w2w004; w2w006; w2w007; w2w017). Conversely, some participants felt that they were more patient with their children because they did not spend all of their time with them (w2w010; w2w013; w2w022). While perceptions differed about the quality of their interactions since engaging in work-related activities, all participants who were involved in full-time activities felt that they did not spend enough time with their children. Karen, for instance, described her dissatisfaction with the compromise between work and family: when she was on welfare she lacked financial resources, but spent time with her son; now that she was working full-time she had more money, but she was not able to see her son enough (w2w007-02). There were simply not enough hours in the day to engage in paid work and spend adequate time with children. Dana sums this up: "Sometimes, because some days that it's really hectic, you're in your rush, and you can't really, um, visit with them or communicate. It's more like: 'get into the living room, go play, watch TV or something'. And then you have to try to make supper…" (w2w020-02).

The day-to-day grind had implications for the overall health of the participants. All of the participants described the fatigue and stress involved with the never-ending demands of each day, describing themselves as chronically exhausted, tired, stressed, and overwhelmed. Dana indicated that when her children were sick, she was particularly stressed because she had to make alternative childcare arrangements. For the few participants that did obtain full-time work, the schedule was even more intense than being in school, and struggles with juggling responsibilities were particularly poignant. Karen, for instance, explained that she was extremely tired and often sick. Samantha, although pleased with her ability to find full-time work, described herself as being exhausted and sick with colds and infections. She indicated that the day-to-day reality of her life was that she was "pitching hay," trying to make it from one day to the next. The relentless nature of her life came to a head for her. She described one day in which she felt unable to cope any longer:

> There are days that I've actually sat in this chair, there was one time in particular I remember, and I feel guilty inside about it even when I think about it. But I sat on the chair and Jimmy was sleeping, and I couldn't go out, I couldn't get out, I couldn't get a babysitter. I didn't even know where I wanted to go, but I needed out, and I felt so trapped. And I had to phone my mom [in another province] and say mom, I'm going to leave right now. I was ready to walk out the door, leave the door open and just go. I didn't know what I was going to do but I just wanted out. I'd never felt that before…[I am] suffocating, I can't go anywhere or do anything, see anybody or, you know (w2w017-03).

It could be argued that all working parents face this demanding schedule, and that the challenges faced by the participants are unremarkable. However, for lone parents living in poverty, the demands are greater, the rewards are fewer, and the work outside the work has to be done single-handedly. Housework, childcare and transportation take more effort with no vehicle in which to transport groceries and children. Jobs at the low-end of the labour market do not provide substantial monetary rewards. Even though women still do much of the house and caring work in two-parent families, participants' stories suggested that caring for house and home alone was qualitatively more difficult. One participant, Carla, who reconciled with her husband during the year I interviewed her, described the difference in the day-to-day grind for single parents:

> The stressful thing of course, like any other working parent, you have to get up at a certain hour and be out the door at a certain hour. As a single parent, it's more stressful because you don't have the extra help that you need, you have to do it all yourself (w2w106).

In short, meeting all the demands of work and family could be overwhelming.

Whether or not the impact of welfare-to-work was positive or overwhelming for participants seemed to be nuanced by a number of factors including whether the participant was in a program or working, the number of hours of work in the week, type of work, the support offered by others and the number of personal issues to address. On balance, employability programs were positive for family-functioning because they required that parents have a morning routine yet did not overly tax the parents because the programs did not entail a 40-hour work week. The pre-employability program only required an eight hour commitment per week, spread over three days, and the full-time employability programs ran from 9:00 am to 3:00 or 4:00 pm, with Fridays reserved for job search. Therefore, employability programs offered participants a stimulating, structured environment with the hope of a future without the relentless demands of 40-hour work week. Furthermore, because the programs ran on weekdays, childcare was guaranteed and secure in a daycare facility. Finally, for those who obtained student-finance funding, their income was substantially increased.

Employment, on the other hand, had no such guarantees. As discussed earlier, many participants realized that obtaining the same amount of income from earnings as from student finance would be difficult. Furthermore, employment during regular hours was hard to obtain, jobs did not often pay well and were not necessarily stimulating. Three of the four participants who obtained full-time work, Mel, Samantha, and Karen, expressed more work/family conflict than the others. Full-time work took more energy than employability programs because it took considerably more time. And, although full-time work offered a higher income than social assistance, these participants still struggled with income insecurity. Their earnings, although full-time, were modest, ranging from $8.00 to $10.50 per hour.

Those with part-time jobs that paid relatively well and offered non-monetary rewards seemed to be the most satisfied with the transition from welfare to work. Part-time employment offered participants the advantages of working, giving them purpose and reducing their stigma, but it was not as taxing as full-time work, helping them to juggle work and family obligations more satisfactorily. Carla, Barbara and Carrie all obtained satisfactory part-time positions that paid well, between $11.00 and $13.00 per hour. Barbara worked as a teacher's aid, Carrie as a nurse's aid, and Carla in an administrative assistant position. In addition to the work being interesting, stimulating and rewarding, it was not full-time, thereby allowing for more work/family balance.

Carla, in particular, appeared to have the most successful transition from welfare to work. Carla's situation was different from the others due to a number of factors. She obtained a permanent, part-time job working 12 hours per week, earning $13.00 per hour. The job was stimulating, and granted her a certain amount of autonomy and flexibility. She indicated that the flexibility of her employer reduced her stress significantly. She was able to take phone calls from home, which differed markedly from her previous job as a retail worker, where she had no flexibility or autonomy. In addition, Carla had reconciled with her husband, who had stopped abusing alcohol. Her husband only worked occasionally because he had considerable health problems, but when he worked he earned a good wage that supplemented the family income significantly. Their combined wages enabled Carla to leave the SFI rolls and provided enough income for them to live modestly but adequately. Furthermore, because Carla's husband was present in the mornings, he could assist with the morning routine, hence reducing Carla's stress significantly. She indicated that she could sleep an extra hour per night because her husband was there to help. Carla also enjoyed support from her extended family and church community, which gave her family a social environment free of alcohol. She perceived herself and her children as doing so well that she indicated that she was going to volunteer in a reading program at her children's school because "some kids out there are not as blessed as some others are" (w2w106-03).

In reflecting on why Carla appeared to have the most successful transition from welfare to work, a number of factors came into play. Her situation worked because the various components integral to maintaining self-sufficiency were present. Carla had good health, children with good health, social support, a job which provided an adequate hourly income and job satisfaction (which she was able to get because of her education and job skills), and a partner who offset some of the day-to-day pressures of childcare and finances. Additionally, because she only worked part-time, she was able to balance her work and family pressures to her satisfaction. Looking at Carla's situation holistically allows us to see that these factors in combination created a situation where she was able to be employed and maintain a certain level of well-being. If any of these pieces were eliminated, however, her situation could change rapidly. If Carla's health status deteriorated, if her income decreased with a change in marital status, if she lost her social support and was therefore no longer able to manage work and family, she might not be able to work any longer. That the elimination of any of these factors could tip the balance and preclude Carla from working underscores the fragile equilibrium that each of the participants struggled to find and maintain. Although the integrated and tenuous nature of all these factors is apparent in this example, this common story is not adequately reflected in policies which are intended to move people into the labour market.

Discussion of the work outside the work

Within the Supports for Independence policies is some recognition of the problem parents face when working in the labour market. Welfare recipients may be categorized as "not expected to work" if they have a child under six months of age, are caring for a disabled family member, have recently left an abusive relationship, have child welfare involvement which requires their full attention, or "have been assessed as having *unusual* difficulty in coping with the competing demands of family and work" (SFI 02-03, p. 3, emphasis added). Although this policy seems to cover the main issues faced by welfare recipients, my analysis suggests that current policies fall short in some regards. The findings here suggest that even if a parent is having *usual* difficulty in balancing his/her work and family life, this ought to be considered an adequate exemption from mandatory work programs. To require a low-income parent to commence full-time work with pre-school children, particularly a six-month-old baby, is unrealistic and unlikely to lead to the policy goal of self-sufficiency through labour-force attachment. Interestingly, Alberta and several U.S. states are the only jurisdictions amongst all of the Canadian provinces, U.S. states, and numerous European countries which require mothers to return to work when their child is six months of age. In other jurisdictions, mothers are exempt from work requirements until their youngest child is anywhere from one to 14-years of age (Jenson 2003).

In the next section I consider my findings about the work/family balance of participants within the context of labour-force participation rates for women with children overall. I do this to demonstrate that the policy to push low-income women with young children into the labour market does not factor-in the realities and subsequent choices made by mothers of young children generally.

Labour-force participation rates

Contextualizing the work/family balance issues of my participants within knowledge about the labour-force participation rates of Canadian women with children in general is telling as it reveals a disconnect between SFI policies to facilitate labour-market participation and knowledge about the labour-market participation of women overall. National studies demonstrate that although the majority of Canadian women are employed in the paid labour market, women are still employed fewer hours than men. Using Labour Force Survey data, Chaykowski and

Powell (1999) found that the labour-force participation of women 15 years of age and older is 58.1%, compared to 72.4% for men. Young children in the home account for much of this difference, although other factors mitigated this somewhat. Women with more education are more likely to be employed than women with less education. Eighty percent of women with a university degree are employed in the labour market, compared to only 41% of those with some high school. Intuitively, this finding makes sense. Given that education and income are positively correlated (Statistics Canada, 2003), it is not surprising that those with higher-level professional and managerial positions are able to purchase services to juggle their paid work and unpaid family work (Higgins & Duxbury, 2001), such as cleaning and nanny services. Additionally, they are more likely to have autonomous work and flexibility, enabling them to balance work and family more satisfactorily. Conversely, low-income workers do not benefit from these privileges, making the housework and childcare work on edges of their work days even more stressful and multifaceted than that of higher-income workers. These women might therefore opt to work less if at all possible, given the greater demands on their time for unpaid caring work. The key point here is that the literature on women's labour-force participation rates suggests that women overall are struggling with work/family balance. If women generally struggle with this balance, even those with additional resources, how are low-income women going to manage?

Marital status combined with the presence of children is also a significant factor in looking at women's labour-market participation. Chaykowski and Powell (1999) found that 69% of married mothers with pre-school-aged children (0-5) were employed, compared to 54% of lone-parent mothers (Chaykowski & Powell, 1999). This suggests that the presence of a spouse may create conditions more conducive to employment in the labour market. Recent research has shown that although women still take responsibility for the majority of home and childcare responsibilities, Canadian fathers are more involved in childcare than ever before in history (Higgins & Duxbury 2001). It is possible that fathers' increased involvement in childcare may make it more realistic for women with partners to be employed in the labour market, especially in jobs that require non-standard hours of work. Whatever the reason, it is clear that although women's labour-force participation has increased significantly in the last several decades, less educated lone mothers with pre-school children are still less likely to be employed.

It is also important to note that the majority of mothers with pre-school children chose part-time work over full-time work (Higgins & Duxbury, 2001). In comparing reasons for working part-time according to sex, 39% of women between the ages of 25-44 cited caring for children or other personal/family responsibilities as their reasons for part-time employment, versus 4.6% of men in the same cohort (Statistics Canada, 2004b). This suggests that in attempting to find a balance between paid work and family obligations, most women are still choosing part-time work in order to leave time for their caring-work responsibilities. Chaykowski and Powell (1999) reached the conclusion that "the presence of children (in particular, pre-school-aged children) are found to have a significant negative effect on the LFP [labour-force participation] decisions of women and their supply of hours to work" (p. S3). That this is the case for the majority of Canadian women must surely be factored into policy decisions impacting low-income mothers with pre-school children. Given that mothers with "regular" challenges have difficulty negotiating paid work and unpaid family work (Hochschild, 1989), it hardly surprising that the parents in my study, most of whom were lone mothers, had even more difficulty successfully integrating work and family. The daily struggles of negotiating work and family could make the demands of each day a struggle.

In summary, the SFI program, as evidenced by its policies to move welfare recipients into the labour force, does not make adequate provisions for low-income single parents with young children. This signals a disconnect between the experiences as explained by welfare recipients in this study and other empirical research, and the policies that impact welfare recipients' lives. Although it is known that mothers generally struggle with work/family balance, and that women earn fewer dollars than men, these two critical issues are not adequately taken into account when developing policies for low-income parents, specifically mothers. Yet these factors significantly affect the experiences of low-income parents in welfare-to-work programs, and will ultimately impact the outcomes of employability programs.

Summary of "the reality"

To summarize, the reality of welfare-to-work for participants, as opposed to the promise, was that for the majority of participants, employment and income did not improve significantly. Moreover, the work outside the work created considerable stress, fatigue and anxiety for them. Although participants wanted to work, the process of achieving this goal was complex and potentially unattainable for many of them.

In the next section, I draw upon the experiences of the participants to explicate larger social processes that are connected to these experiences, what Smith (1998) refers to as "the mapping of social relations." Below I show how aspects of neo-liberalism have influenced the new policy orientation of the social investment state, and are at play in the day-to-day lives of the participants in this study.

The Mapping of Social Relations

As discussed in chapter three, the methodology of institutional ethnography requires the researcher to move beyond description of the experiences of participants. Although the institutional ethnographer starts with individual experience, the problematics of interest are ultimately the policies and social processes which contribute to shaping these experiences. Throughout this chapter, I have shown the connections between experiences and policies, revealing that policies intended to facilitate labour-force attachment fall short in reaching their goals, largely because of their continued emphasis on human capital and their lack of attention to the labour-market realities and work/family linkages of low-income families.

Here I expand this discussion further to explicate the linkages among the experiences of study participants, the policies which shape them, and neo-liberal ideological shifts regarding the role of social policy in minimizing inequalities between individuals and families. To this end, I revisit the concept of self-sufficiency in light of my findings, showing how concepts and policies can look quite different when we see how they play-out in individual lives. I then show the connection between current social assistance policies and neo-liberal influences as exhibited in the social investment state as developed through Third Way politics.

The Text of the Relations of Ruling

Self-sufficiency revisited

After substantial analysis and reflection about what the experiences of participants in this study most reveal about the larger social processes that shape their lives, I have arrived at the following conclusion: the concept of self-sufficiency, central to welfare reform, is uninformed. Potentially misleading in its simplicity, this point seems to me to encapsulate all I have heard, observed, and puzzled over in the three years I have struggled to make sense of these data, with the contradictions and nuances. Because of the centrality of this concept in welfare-to-work, I revisit it here, mapping the relations between the experiences of participants and self-sufficiency. To this end, I reflect on two integral sub-concepts within the concept of self-sufficiency-- "reasonableness" and "employability," -- to consider how these notions look considerably different in the text of the ruling relations than in the lives of people affected by the policies. I then deconstruct the form, "the employment plan," used for social assistance recipients, showing how the standardization of experiences through texts dilutes and makes invisible the individual experiences of welfare recipients.

Reasonableness

Welfare recipients expected to look for work are required to take any "reasonable job" they are offered, and "not limit themselves to a specific type of job or a specified pay range" (AFSS, 1993, 02-02, p. 4). A "reasonable job" is defined as employment which "the client is capable of doing; and pays a reasonable wage (at least minimum wage); and does not jeopardize the health and well being of the client" (02-01, p. 4). When examining this definition in relation to the experiences of participants in this study, several points need to be reiterated. Is minimum wage a reasonable remuneration given that it is not a living wage? Full-time work at the minimum wage rate of $5.90 per hour would result in an annual market gross income of $12,272. Even with approximately $2,400 of additional income as offered through the Canada Child Tax Benefit in 2000/2001, for a total gross income of $14,673, a single parent with one child would fall short of the Market Basket Measure (MBM) of $16,684, a $2,011 difference.

Living off minimum wage earned in a "reasonable job" may have potentially negative impacts on health given that it will not meet basic needs. Previously, I indicated that recognized research clearly establishes a link between low income and poor health (Humphries & van Doorslaer, 2000; Mustard, Derksen, Berthelot, Wolfson & Roos, 1997; Wilkins, Adams & Brancker, 1989), as well as a link between low control at work and poor health (Bosma, Marmot, Hemingway, Nicholson Brunner & Stansfeld, 1997). Additionally, I have suggested that if a person's low-income status is not rectified by market income, and the person's job lacks flexibility, autonomy, and control, this employment may further exacerbate preexisting health problems. Finally, the notion of a "reasonable job" does not consider the invisible work required to maintain employment such as securing adequate childcare, maintaining a household, and finding transportation to and from the worksite. In other words, it does not address the work outside the work of paid employment. A key issue here seems to be an understanding of the term reasonable. One participant, Danielle, reframed this. She stated: "So, you know, what they think is realistic is not realistic, and I'm living proof. I'm not a lazy person, and I don't drink, or do drugs, and it's not like I don't want to work" (w2w014). In short, the understanding of the term "reasonable," and the policies guided by that understanding, do not reflect the lived experiences of welfare recipients.

Many of the policy assumptions related to self-sufficiency, when read at face-value, seem reasonable. At first glance, it is difficult to argue with the notion that earning an income is a more desirable situation than relying on someone else to provide money when needed, especially money funneled through a bureaucracy with strings attached. Implicit in the notion of "earned income" is the entitlement to spend that income as you choose, thereby guaranteeing a certain amount of control and autonomy to the earner. And, there is some legitimacy in this assumption. Economic independence offers individuals more choices than economic dependence. For instance, economic dependence on husbands is one of the key factors in explaining why women do not leave abusive spouses (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997).

The findings presented here suggest, however, that there are oversights in the supposition that working is better than not working. Inherent in the notion that working is preferable to social assistance is the assumption that employment will provide some income security for the worker. Similar to other studies which found that job security for low-income workers is perilous at best (Gorlick & Brethour, 1998a; Shillington, 1998; Vosko, 1999) the findings here reveal that much of the work available to study participants was precarious, part-time and low-wage. Moreover, this supposition overlooks the possibility that some people live complex and difficult lives that may not be conducive to steady, well-paying employment. In my sample, health problems and the exacerbated challenges of low-income workers attempting to balance paid work and unpaid family work raise questions about whether or not it is reasonable to expect low-income parents of young children to work full-time.

Employability

A key concept in understanding the implications of the push toward self-sufficiency in current SFI policy documents is employability. As discussed in chapter five, SFI workers determine whether or not a SFI recipient is "expected to work" (ETW) or "not expected to work" (NETW) through a somewhat arcane process. If ETW, the welfare recipient is then required to engage in activities leading to employment. Gorlick and Brethour (1998b) point out that, because of the welfare-to-work trend, governments now consider a larger pool of people employable than before. One such group is single parents, most of whom are women. That employability is a policy construct, and not an intrinsic state of being, becomes clear when observing that whether or not a parent is considered employable is dependent upon the age of the child that the province sets. Gorlick and Brethour poignantly ask: why is a parent considered employable in Alberta when his or her youngest child is aged six months of age, but not until the child is aged two in Saskatchewan?

An analysis of work exemptions shows that they are oftentimes considered temporary. For instance, those categorized as needing transitional support are deemed employable in the future, albeit not in the present. They include those with health problems and those with family care responsibilities. Those categorized under assured support are defined as those with a "persistent mental or physical health problem" that will preclude them from "full-time/continuous employment in the regular labour market" (AFSS, 1993, 02-03, p. 7). In other words, it does not preclude them from part-time, non-continuous employment in a sheltered environment. Clients deemed to have multiple barriers may be placed into this category. The three participants who changed their status from NETW to ETW during the course of this study demonstrate the fluidity of this concept. That this concept is so changeable could potentially create further instability for welfare recipients, with their knowledge that their status could change at any moment. Furthermore, its changeableness reveals that the notion of entitlement to a basic income for those in need is obsolete in current SFI policies. Although entitlement for basic income has historically been precarious and partial, in current thinking it no longer exists.

The standardization of experience through text

In this section, I review the employment plan used by SFI to create a plan for participants because it is an excellent example of a text used by the relations of ruling to standardize individuals' experiences. The analysis of this standard and seemingly innocuous form shows how, through the standardization of experiences, the individuals' situations get diluted, and the experiences become, in effect, invisible. Fraser (1989) elaborates on this notion, arguing that in subsystems "experienced situations and life problems are translated into administrable needs; and since the latter are not necessarily isomorphic to the former, the possibility of a gap between them arises. This possibility is especially likely in the 'feminine' subsystem, for there…service provision has the character of normalization…" (Fraser, 1989, p. 155).

All welfare recipients who are classified as expected to work (ETW), with the exception of self-employed individuals and those employed full-time with insufficient earnings, are required to complete the Employment Plan with their workers (AFSS, 1993, SSA 2104-02, p. 1). Interestingly, those not expected to work (NETW) for temporary designations such as disability, health concerns, or family care responsibilities are still required to complete an employment plan (AFSS, 1993, SSA 2104-02, p. 1), showing that the status of "non-expected to work" is expected to change to the status of "expected to work". In other words, the designations of ETW and NETW mean little.

The form has templates for the client's name, employment goal, steps to getting a job, and "other information" which is unspecified. An initial review of the employment plan gave me the impression that it is a relatively benign and routine form intended to assist a welfare recipient in a strategic job search. A closer look at the employment plan with the experiences of participants in mind, however, reveals much about SFI policies specifically, and the direction of welfare-to-work initiatives more generally. In looking at the form, I am struck by not only how little information is collected, but also how much the scant information reveals the potential shortcomings of welfare-to-work policies.

The plan clearly outlines the expectations for clients. It states: "I know I must actively look for work, keep records of my job search efforts and take any job; I know if I do not do what this plan requires my SFI benefits may stop" (SFI-06-2104-01). The SFI worker is required to highlight the "client's responsibility to follow through on the steps outlined," reminding the client of the possible consequences of failing to do so. The completion directions for the form explain that the purpose of the employment plan is to "[e]stablish the client's commitment to the steps required to achieve independence" (SFI-06-2104-02). Interestingly, while the SFI Policy Manual states upfront that an assumption of the income support policies is that "clients want to work and become independent," the unstated assumption in the subsequent policies seems to be that clients cannot be trusted, are unmotivated to work and need a push into the labour market.

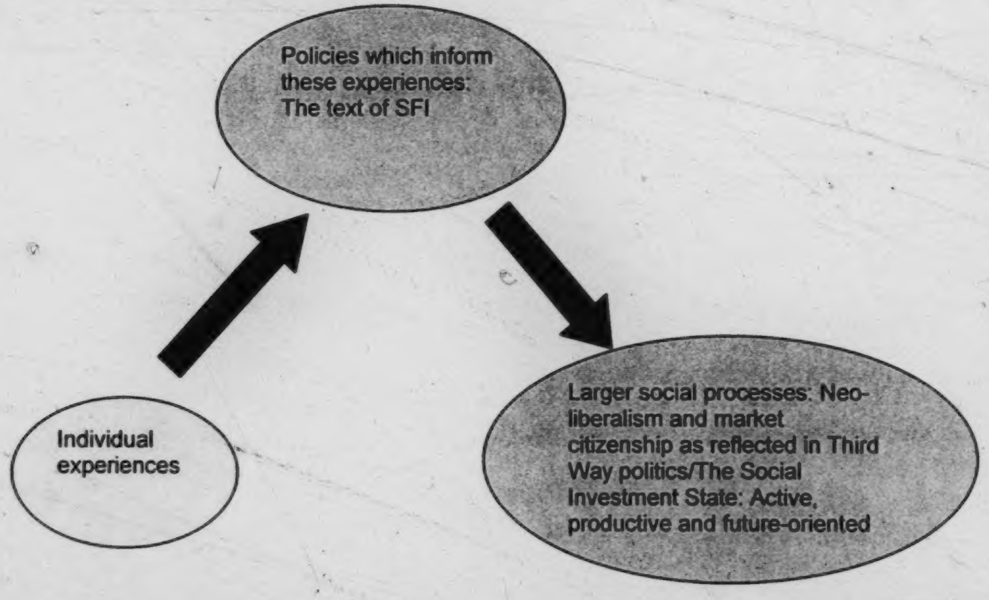
What is missing in this plan tells us more than what is there. What is not in the employment plan is recognition of the potentially enormous challenge in meeting the employment goals. While it leaves room to outline some of the steps relevant to finding childcare, going to counseling, or applying for student funding, it does not leave room for recognition or resolution of issues like how to reconcile the hours of childcare available through a credible childcare centre with a job that requires evening and night work. Nor does it leave room to address issues such as how to get laundry done in a laundromat while working full-time, caring for children, and trying to get adequate rest. The impact of completing this form is analogous to making an appointment with a travel agent to plan a trip overseas when a person has no money to fund the trip, no passport, and a fear of flying. The form can be completed, but it will not address the holes that need filling before a satisfactory result can occur.

In summary, the concepts of self-sufficiency, reasonableness and employability as understood in welfare-to-work policies do not accurately reflect the day-to-day realities of study participants undergoing welfare-to-work activities. Moreover, through the standardization of needs in the text of SFI policies, the day-to-day realities of participants' lives were sometimes rendered invisible, showing the disconnect between policy claims and lived experience. In the next section I consider how the findings from this study reveal the larger ideological shifts in thinking about the nature of social policy, the obligation of citizens, and the role of the State in minimizing inequalities between individuals and families.

Linkages among experiences, policies and larger social processes: Neo-liberalism and The Social Investment State/Third Way politics

Figure 5 provides a visual representation of the linkages among the experiences of the study participants, welfare-to-work policies, and larger neo-liberal social processes, depicting the shift towards market citizenship. In mapping the social relations informing the experiences of participants, I have discovered that welfare-to-work in Alberta reflects an international trend, embraced also by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), called the Third Way[11], which replaces traditional notions of the welfare state with a social investment state (Bashevkin, 2002; Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003; White, 2003). According to the

Figure 5. The Mapping of Social Relations


Policies which inform these experiences: The text of SFI
Individual experiences
Larger social processes: Neo-liberalism and market citizenship as reflected in Third Way politics/The Social Investment State: Active, productive and future-oriented

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[11] Noteworthy is that the Honourable Ralph Klein, Premier of Alberta, recently argued for a "third way" in healthcare reform that would move beyond the public/private dichotomy (CBC Website, January 12, 2005). It is unclear whether or not Mr. Klein was referring to the international "Third Way" policy trend.

Third Way perspective, the role of social policy is to invest in health, education, and other initiatives that cultivate human and social capital, thereby fostering the development of active, autonomous, and responsible citizens (White, 2003). Central to Third Way thinking is what Giddens (1998) termed the social investment state (as cited in Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003). Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003) demonstrate clearly how Giddens distinguished the traditional welfare state from the new social investment state: "The old welfare state, for Giddens, sought to protect people *from the market*. A social investment state, by contrast, would facilitate the integration of people *into the market*" (p. 83, emphasis in original). In contrast to the *passive and present* nature of the traditional welfare state, the social welfare state would be *active and future-oriented*. According to this approach, public spending must be effective and worthwhile, which means that it cannot simply address current needs, but "must be an investment that will pay off and reap rewards in the future" (Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003). In short, the social investment state is active, productive and future oriented (Jenson & Denis-Martin, 2003). Poignantly, Saint-Martin (2000) states that in the social investment state, social policy no longer serves as a safety net; instead it is more analogous to a trampoline (as cited in White, 2003, p. 68).

Central to the social investment state are concepts of inclusion and exclusion, largely determined by employment status. White (2003) comments on this:

> Labour force participation has become the *de facto* dividing line between the "included" and the "excluded," so that, for example if singles mothers as a group tend to be poor, this is explained by their "exclusion" from the labour market. The solution is not to improve their social rights, making it possible

for them to better fulfill their family obligations. Rather, government's concern translates into measures to incite their labour market participation (p. 71).

In the social investment state, how the market is viewed is significantly different than that of the Keynesian welfare state. Where Keynes saw the market as a place whereby citizens at times needed *protection from* due to its volatility, it is viewed in the social investment state as the place in which citizens *gain protection* from income insecurity. Policy during the time of the Keynesian welfare state reflected the notion that the role of social policy was to mitigate risk inherent within the market. Conversely, current social policy trends reflect the notion that the role of policy is to bolster the resilience of the individual so that s/he can mollify risk. Another way of thinking about this is that where risk was once associated with the labour market, risk is now located in the individual (White, 2003). Overall, the goal of the social investment state "is more to fight *against* social exclusion than *for* social equality" (Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003, p. 91, emphasis in original).

Bashevkin (2002) points out that although Third Way politicians (the Chretien liberals in the case of Canada) may have appeared to have more progressive ideas than the conservative government before them due to their "inventive rhetoric about the balanced middle path," they were, in fact, even more punitive and restrictive (Bashevkin, 2002, p. 9). Arguing that they did not offer any structural or material solutions to poverty, Bashevkin posits that "the Third Way…offered no warm, fuzzy blanket of traditional liberal of social democratic compassion. Rather, in most cases, it offered up a cold, hard slab of individualist pavement called market readiness" (p. 9). Indeed, the social investment state reflects elements of neo-liberalism with its belief that the state should be run like a business and invest with the notion of future profits.

A discussion of the social investment state and Third Way politics is included here, because this policy trend in Canada is the practical application of the more elusive notions of market citizenship and neo-liberal ideology. Its focus on labour-market attachment, active social policy (as opposed to the passive welfare state), and productivity show how the notion of basic income provided on the basis of social citizenship rights is gone. In short, the social investment state is a national policy example of market citizenship at work and is clearly demonstrated in welfare-to-work policies in Alberta. Where the post-war welfare state in Canada, albeit far from complete, was an example of social citizenship at work, the current social investment state is evidence of the trend toward market citizenship. It must be noted that the social investment state does not reflect pure neo-liberalism. In a purely neo-liberal state, there would be no social policy whatsoever, as the government would have no role to play in social programs. This incomplete introduction of neo-liberalism emphasizes the piece-meal and oftentimes contradictory ways in which ideologies are evidenced and implemented in living public policies.

The findings from my study support the thesis that Canada has shifted from a state based on social rights, or social citizenship, to active policies within the conceptualization of a social investment state, or market citizenship. Welfare-to-work policies in Alberta mirror characteristics of the social investment state. Clearly, social assistance policies intended to move participants into the labour market demonstrate a commitment to the belief that self-sufficiency through labour market participation is best. Furthermore, the emphasis on individual characteristics such as education and job skills, and the lack of emphasis on structural barriers such as low wages, a precarious labour market and universal childcare reveal the pervasiveness of neo-liberal ideology in the active welfare state.

Interestingly, Alberta moved to a new income support program in 2004 called "Alberta Works". This new program is based on four basic values: hope, accountability, respect and a hand-up (Stojak and Morris, 2004). Like the SFI policies, clearly reflected in this new set of policies is the goal to make the self-sufficiency of social assistance clients the first priority. In fact, the new set of policies is more explicit in its goal of greater independence of social assistance recipients, evidenced by the fact that the definition of those expected to work has expanded to include numerous categories of welfare recipients earlier deemed "not expected to work". For example those with health problems lasting longer than three months, and those with family care responsibilities, while deemed "temporarily unable to work" are still classified in the "expected to work" category (Income Support, 2004b, 02-02, p. 7). Clearly, the ideological freight train of self-sufficiency is further entrenched in social policy than ever before.

Three distinctions in the new set of policies relevant to welfare recipients, compared to the previous policies under the SFI program, are that welfare recipients are permitted greater income exemptions in the new policies, low-income parents who have transitioned from welfare to work are granted a health benefit for themselves (in addition to the health benefit granted to their children previously), and provisions are made to subsidize informal childcare arrangements. These changes suggest that the new Alberta Works approach is attempting to remove barriers to employment. However, the move to subsidize informal childcare does not take into account the research in child development which suggests that informal childcare is often not quality childcare, and may in fact put children at risk (Jenson, 2003). In attempting to facilitate labour-force attachment, children's health and well-being may be jeopardized.

My findings suggest that if policy makers are going to continue to pursue the emphasis on self-sufficiency, they need to put things in place to make work pay and address the work/family nexus. Furthermore, my findings suggest that some people on the margins may not be employable. Within the social investment state, what happens to those who may never be integrated fully through full employment, or at least cannot in the present due to health problems or work/family nexus issues? Not everyone can contribute to society through paid employment, and others cannot contribute at all. Following the logical progression of the social investment state, these people are not worth investing in. From an active, productive, and future-oriented perspective, there will not likely be a pay-off for society. In a state that has clearly moved away from the notion of social rights, what happens to these people? I will pick-up on these points in chapter seven, further exploring the implications of the move to market citizenship as evidenced by the social investment state.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the reality of welfare-to-work looked quite different than the promise of welfare-to-work. Although most participants hoped that welfare-to-work would offer them greater income and food security, social inclusion and autonomy, in the end this did not materialize for the majority of participants. The process of going through welfare-to-work programs did not significantly change the employment status or income for many of the participants. Although some participants did obtain full-time work, and others obtained part-time work with reasonable wages, most participants were still living in poverty at the end of the year. Furthermore, welfare-to-work had significant implications for family-functioning. Although policies are in place to provide childcare to low-income families, this analysis suggests that they fall short in meeting the needs of the participants. The unpaid work that happened on the edges of a paid work day, the work outside the work, took considerable time and energy for participants, making it difficult for them to procure and/or sustain employment. This was due to a number of factors including the complex nature of their lives such as struggles with childcare arrangements and day-to-day functioning, and the poor health of participants and their children (as discussed in chapter four). These challenges, combined with the realities of the low-income labour market (i.e., low wage, part-time shift work with little autonomy or flexibility) made it difficult, if not impossible, for most participants to effectively integrate work and family. Welfare-to-work policies, which embrace the notion that "we are better off when self-sufficient," a common assumption in contemporary society, overlook the actualities of low-income parents' daily lives, and thus do little to facilitate the transition from welfare to work.

The experiences of study participants reveal that the current policy emphasis on active, productive and future-oriented social policy is clearly at work in welfare-to-work policies that focus on labour-force attachment. Participants' experiences also reveal, however, that labour-force attachment may not be the panacea for income insecurity. Reasonably, employment appears to be the best way out of poverty and social exclusion. *If* a person could have a job that pays a reasonable wage it would give him or her a livable income and a ticket into mainstream society. However, the findings of this study suggest that moving welfare recipients into employment is much more complex than simply creating policies which require them to do so. Furthermore, these findings question whether or not SFI's categorization of some welfare recipients as "expected to work" is realistic. Perhaps policy makers need to rethink their criteria for those expected to work, and recognize that with the complexities of their lives, some people in our society cannot work full-time. Rather than continuing to strategize about how to get unemployed welfare recipients working in order to socially include them, maybe we need to think about this issue in a radically different way. Can we view employment as *one of* several ways to have legitimate membership into society? In the concluding chapter, I will revisit the notion of citizenship, and explore this idea further.

Chapter Seven
Citizenship Revisited

"Shall we, as a society, treat our most needy as animals treat their deficient ones?...Or, shall we step in, to nourish them with genuine human kindness and respect that is reflected through our words and deeds for the benefit of us all?"
James Lauder (2004)

Introduction and Review of Findings

In the quote above, the author eloquently asks a fundamental question which the findings of this study point to. That is, as a society, what will we choose to do about the most marginalized people in our midst? Related to this query are the broad questions posed at the beginning of this study about the impacts of welfare-to-work on the well-being of families in poverty, the implications of welfare-to-work policies on the citizenship entitlements of impoverished citizens, and the role of the state in providing economic security for all citizens. With these questions in mind, the primary undertaking of this study was to explore the impacts of welfare-to-work initiatives on the economic and non-economic lives of families living in poverty. The purpose of this examination was ultimately to move beyond participant experiences, however, to explicate the unseen connections between the day-to-day lives of welfare recipients and the policies that influence these experiences, and to explore what the experiences of study participants reveal about current understandings of citizenship in Canada within the context of neo-liberal ideology.

This study revealed the linkages between welfare-to-work policies and the experiences of welfare recipients who took part in this study, specifically juxtaposing claims from the Government of Alberta and the Supports for Independence (SFI) policy goals with the experiences of study participants. To summarize, this study resulted in the following key findings. Contrary to popular conceptions, but consistent with other research (Monroe & Tiller, 2001; Seccombe, Battle Walters, & James, 1999), participants did not want to be on welfare. Welfare was riddled with hardship which may have exacerbated pre-existing health problems. Within the context of life on social assistance, participants viewed welfare-to-work programs as "the promise" of a better life. The promise was affirmed by the experiences of welfare recipients in employability programs wherein they experienced social interaction, structured days, a sense of purpose, and increased income through student-finance funding (for those who qualified). Ultimately, however, the promise was not fulfilled. Instead "the reality" set in when the majority of participants were unable to facilitate secure attachment to the labour-market and found themselves in continued poverty. Additionally, welfare-to-work programs had significant implications for family-functioning, as the work outside the work of paid employment took considerable time, energy and planning which could be overwhelming. Moreover, childcare posed barriers, even with childcare subsidy, because employment was often not compatible with childcare availability. Overall, for participants who obtained employment and for those who did not, the future was still precarious.

Findings from my study complement findings from other parts of the larger research project which examined the outcomes of welfare-to-work on the health and well-being of pre-school children living in poverty. Exploring the linkages among family income source, family income status and pre-school children's readiness, Williamson and Salkie (2005) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) and found that children in low-income families whose income was derived from the market had higher scores on school readiness than their counterparts who lived on income derived from social assistance. This was the case independent of family environment characteristics that differentiated working poor and social assistance poor families, and was not affected by welfare-to-work initiatives. Importantly, scores were lower for poor children, regardless of source of income, when compared to non-poor children. Similarly, Williamson et al. (2005) conducted bivariate and multivariate analysis of 59 semi-structured interviews with parents of children under three-years old to examine the linkages among child cognitive development, caregiver activity, income source, and family characteristics (which included income adequacy, caregiver depressive symptoms and caregiver education). Findings show that income adequacy and caregiver education were most strongly related to children's cognitive scores. Furthermore, both of these variables were better relative predictors than the employment-only income source variable. Williamson et al. (2005) conclude that level of income is more important than source of income in its impact on the health and development of poor pre-school children. Most generally, these findings dovetail with my findings that adequate financial resources contribute to health and well-being, and that welfare-to-work does not seem to have significantly changed the health and well-being outcomes for impoverished families.

In mapping the social processes which led to the experiences of participants, I have found that core tenets of neo-liberalism are at play in welfare-to-work policies. Inherent in welfare-to-work policies, for example, are the beliefs that the state has only minimal responsibility for the well-being of its citizens, and that the market is the best path to income security. Consequently, the focus has been to reduce welfare dependency through labour-force attachment, using mandatory welfare-to-work programs to achieve this goal. However, through this in-depth exploration, I have also discovered that a concurrent yet somewhat contradictory movement is also at play in welfare-to-work: the social investment state. Where neo-liberal ideological influences emphasize fiscal responsibility and minimal government involvement in the social policy arena, the social investment state proposes an *active* policy agenda intended to develop productive citizens, ultimately enhancing social capital. Hence, it substitutes the neo-liberal tenets of reducing government spending and shrinking social policy with the notion of new public spending that will have a return on its investment through enhanced social capital. Although the social investment state departs from pure neo-liberal ideas through active social spending, it still reflects the neo-liberal notion that the market is the best place for citizens to find income security. To this end, spending within the social investment state is geared towards creating self-sufficient individuals rather than promoting social equality. In many ways, then, the social investment state is neo-liberalism in new clothes.

Experiences of study participants put into question basic assumptions of neo-liberalism and active social policy. Previously, I suggested that policies which may appear realistic and reasonable at first glance have much more complex implications than first evidenced. As such, the text as written by the "relations of ruling" (Smith, 1987) does not adequately reflect the needs and realities of welfare recipients. In the process of standardizing welfare recipients' needs and attributes into efficient categories (such as expected to work and not expected to work), or summarizing life realities on standardized forms (such as the employment plan), individual experiences are watered down, rendering them in many instances invisible. A gap between welfare policies and the needs of welfare recipients subsequently occurs. I argued earlier that what has happened as a result of this process of the dilution and standardization of welfare recipients' needs is that the notion underlying social assistance policies – that welfare recipients are better off when self-sufficient – is uninformed. Active social policies, which mandate labour-force attachment, potentially well-intended, are disconnected from the realities of welfare recipients' lives, including their health, their work realities in an increasingly deregulated labour market, and their day-to-day management of child and caring work. Ironically, the active welfare state can be paralyzing to welfare recipients who cannot achieve self-sufficiency within their current economic, social, political environments. Self-sufficiency is the new conceptual trap in which welfare recipients find themselves ensnared.

There are several sections to this chapter. In the next section I revisit the concepts of health, gender and citizenship – key concepts in this study – to discuss further some of the insights I gained while conducting this research. Following this discussion, I shift to policy implications of this research, concluding this section with a vision for "the good society" using Robertson's (1998, 1999) moral economy of interdependence as a roadmap. In the final section, I delineate the implications of this study for research and theory.

Health implications of welfare-to-work

One of the objectives of this study was to consider how welfare reform influenced the health and well-being of low-income families mandated into welfare-to-work activities. I posited that based on prior research, the health problems of welfare recipients might preclude them from obtaining or maintaining suitable employment. As discussed in chapter four, many of the participants and/or their children in my study experienced a wide range of health problems as they entered welfare-to-work activities. Given the already poor health status of many of the participants of this study, I considered whether welfare-to-work would further exacerbate these problems and preclude employment for participants.

At first glance, my findings do not show any striking long-term impacts of welfare-to-work activities on the health of welfare recipients. Although the employability programs seemed to have both positive and negative impacts on health and well-being, giving participants purpose and hope on the one hand, and creating increased fatigue and stress on the other, on balance, the impact on health seemed to be unsurprising and of little consequence. However, from a critical perspective, the impacts on health may be more remarkable.

According to some population health scholars, income inequality may have significant implications for health. The relationship between income inequality and health is worth considering in the Canadian context because, after 1994, when Canadian federal and provincial governments initiated significant cuts to reduce deficits, government transfers which might have offset market inequalities were reduced, thereby increasing income inequality (Sharpe, 2003).The psycho-social and the neo-material explanations are the two predominant approaches to understanding how income inequality and health are related (Raphael, 2000). The psycho-social approach emphasizes the difference in social standing in the social hierarchy. This theory, developed by Richard Wilkinson (1996), indicates that in developing countries, the correlation between the Gross National Product (GNP) and health status is most important. However, in richer countries, where mortality occurs more often from chronic illness than acute illness, income inequality becomes a more significant determinant of health. According to Wilkinson, the relationship between income inequality and health is explained by psycho-social factors. Disease is created by way of social hierarchies due to the poor self-esteem linked to lower status which, in turn, impacts health via psycho-neuro-biological pathways (Coburn, 2004). In contrast to psycho-social explanations, population health scholars who espouse the neo-material approach argue that those with less income have poorer health status due to a combination of factors: inadequate material resources required to purchase health-promoting goods and services such as nutritious food, suitable housing and health-enhancing recreational activities; negative exposures as a result of a lack of material resources such as sub-standard housing; and "systematic underinvestment" in social and health infrastructures (Lynch, Smith, Kaplan & House, 2000).

To explicate the difference between psycho-social and neo-material explanations of the relationship between income inequality and health, Lynch et al. (2000) utilize an instructive metaphor of first and second class sections of an airplane. They point out that the differences in material conditions between the two classes will have effects on the passengers after a long flight. Because first-class passengers have more space, better food, and more comfortable, reclining seats, they will exit the plane feeling more rested than those in the cramped, uncomfortable quarters of the economy section who were more unlikely to sleep during the flight. Following the logic of a psycho-social perspective, the solution to this problem would be to remove the first-class section so that no inequality is perceived. From a neo-material perspective, however, eliminating first-class seats would not help those in the back who suffered poorer health due to sub-standard environmental conditions. Rather, the solution would be to improve the conditions in economy-class.

Although psycho-social and neo-material theories are generally used within the context of population health, some health scholars have argued that in order to tease out the nuances of the relationship between income inequality and health, approaches which utilize individual level data are advantageous because they are "able to look at the direct effect of income inequality without having to handle the effects of inequality that work through aggregation" (Judge & Paterson, 2001). A comprehensive look at the large and complex literature on the relationships between poverty, income inequality and health is beyond the scope of this discussion[12]. However, I will utilize the neo-material and psycho-social theories to explore critically the potential impacts of welfare-to-work on individual study participants, as these approaches prove useful in illuminating some of the impacts of welfare-to-work.

From a neo-material perspective, the programs, on balance, did not create substantive changes for the participants' lives. One noteworthy exception to this claim is the finding that student-finance funding offered a significant increase in income for participants, thereby increasing their food security and sense of inclusion into mainstream society. However, as I've already discussed, the improvements brought about by student-finance funding lasted only as long as the funding. Despite all the effort involved, at the end of the year most participants still lived in poverty, lacked job security, and faced an economically precarious future.

That the programs did not significantly impact participants' income or employment outcomes is significant for their health because the programs did little to improve their material situations. Had participants experienced significant improvements in employment status, income levels and the ability to participate meaningfully in mainstream society, the programs may have substantively improved the health status of participants and their children. Given that they did not, the long-term outlook for participants is bleak. Furthermore, a neo-material perspective examines the structural processes whereby income inequality impacts health. Welfare-to-work programs, not unlike other social and economic policies, did little to alter the status quo through structural changes such as a higher minimum wage or full-employment strategies and in fact simply reinforced an individualist approach to employment and earnings. This suggests that structurally the neo-material environment was not altered in any way.

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[12] For a comprehensive review of this literature, see Judge & Paterson, 2001.

On the other hand, from a psycho-social perspective, a number of participants indicated that even if they were not that much better-off, they had a "glimpse" of what needed to happen next. To extend the airplane metaphor, they had a glance at first-class which showed them where they wanted to be. They perceived themselves as better off, even though there were financially no further ahead. Loreen expressed this thought in the following statement:

> I think it was effective in showing me... what I need to do. You know, like it was effective in the fact that it got me up every morning and gave me a place to go to. It wasn't what I expected, you know, but at the same time, it gave me a glimpse of how things might be, you know? So that part was good (W2w019-02).

From one point of view, this may be positive, propelling participants to engage their individual agency to move ahead and overcome veritable obstacles. Having opportunities to employ individual agency in the waltz between structure and agency is important from a human-ecological perspective.

Conversely, this may be a form of social control – teaching participants to individualize problems that are largely structural. Lynch et al. (2000) suggest in their airplane metaphor that one of the possible solutions to relative disadvantage from a psycho-social perspective is to engage in "mass psychotherapy to alter perceptions" (p. 1203). Vosko (1999) makes a compelling argument to suggest that one of the implicit goals of workfare is to teach welfare recipients to accept the instability of the new labour market. Murphy (1997) provides evidence for this argument. In early training programs in Alberta, one session offered a one-day seminar by Tony

Robbins, the guru of positive thinking. Robbins' contract was not renewed, however, because an external evaluator criticized the program in which welfare recipients were chanting slogans such as "anything is possible" and "I am responsible for my actions" (Murphy, p. 114). Although this program was discontinued, the ongoing emphasis on the notion that any job is a good job suggests that there is some merit to the assertion that welfare-to-work programs individualize problems that have, at least in part, a structural basis. It would seem that an unstated, but clear goal of employability programs is to teach participants to accept the status quo, and to individualize barriers to employment. To teach welfare recipients to accept their fate in the labour market fits with another reconceptualization of the goal of welfare reform by some authors: to provide a cheap labour pool. Peck (2001a), for instance, states: "Stripped down to its labor-regulatory essence, workfare is not about creating jobs for people that don't have them; it is about creating workers for jobs that nobody wants" (p. 6).Through deliberate approaches intended to alter perceptions of welfare-to-work participants, problems with structural roots can be placed on the shoulders of individuals in poverty, thereby negatively impacting their health and well-being.

In summary, the fact that welfare-to-work did not significantly impact the income of participants may show that the long-term health outcomes of welfare-to-work are likely negative. Furthermore, the psycho-social impacts of welfare-to-work further entrench the notion that it is wholly participants' responsibility to change their situations, individualizing and decontextualizing the problem of poverty.

In addition to providing some insights into the impact of welfare-to-work on health, this study makes a contribution to further understanding the intricacies of the relationship between health and poverty. In chapter two I pointed out that the direction of the relationship between health and employment has yet to be established. I posited, however, that if welfare recipients had poor health status that posed challenges to employment, the policy to mandate welfare recipients into labour-force attachment would be ineffective. Moreover, if welfare recipients were unable to find work due to health barriers, this would lead to further poverty. In other words, the relationship between poverty and health would be impacted by employment status.

Findings from this study point to the possibility that in the *current social policy environment,* health problems may lead to poverty. Previous research has generally determined that the direction of the relationship between poverty and health is that poverty status contributes to health status (Raphael, 2000). However, in a society where labour-force attachment increasingly dictates citizenship entitlements, poor health may increasingly impact poverty status. If a person has poor health which precludes him or her from employment, but policy dictates that he or she is still expected to work, this will likely impact his or her employment status and inevitably impact his or her income security, which in turn will exacerbate existing health problems. Although my study did not derive any firm conclusions about the direction of the relationship between poverty and health, it suggests that more longitudinal research is needed to test the hypothesis that if governments continue to hinge income support on labour-force attachment, health status will lead to further poverty.

The gendered implications of welfare-to-work

Central to the analysis in this study was the use of a gender lens to critically examine the impacts of welfare-to-work. Indeed, the use of a gender lens proved useful in a number of ways. First, it showed that the focus on labour force attachment has gendered implications. This study showed that the focus on paid employment has differential impacts for those on the fringes of the workforce due to their difficulty in balancing work and family and the availability of good jobs at the low-end of the labour market. Because there are a disproporinate number of women with young children on welfare (CCSD, 1998), welfare-to-work will have greater consequences for them. Furthermore, because there are a greater number of lone-parent mothers compared to lone-parent fathers, more women than men are required to combine work and family without a spouse. Although women in two-parent households still do the majority of the childcare and housework, current Canadian research shows that having a spouse does offset some of the burden of unpaid caring work[13] (Higgins & Duxbury, 2001). Finally, because women do not typically earn as much as men or hold full-time jobs as often as they do (Chaykowski, & Powell,1999), many of them continue to experience income insecurity which, in-turn, impacts their health and well-being. With the use of a gender lens, we are able to see with greater clarity the experiences of low-income women in welfare states.

Using a gender analysis served a second purpose. In addition to providing a lens with which to examine women's experiences it also provides an opportunity to consider how welfare states are gendered (O'Connor, 1996). The meaning of this becomes clearer in reflecting on the experiences of Mel, the one single father who took part in this study. Although I have long held that gender is socially constructed and many aspects of society are gendered, I do not think I fully understood this until I contemplated Mel's situation throughout this study. Mel caused me to reflect on the gendered implications of welfare-to-work, even though, paradoxically, his presence gender neutralized the language of this study. Because he was one of my participants, I could not use language such as "the women" or "the mothers" without excluding him. Rather, I had to say "the participants" or the "parents", or the "welfare recipients." This put me at unease, given my awareness that gender neutrality is not the same as gender equality.

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[13] It seems that the Yenta in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* may have been right when she said that "having a bad husband is better than having no husband at all."

The presence of Mel created considerable intellectual anxiety for me for other reasons as well. Mel was a man; yet he seemed to have all the same experiences as the women in this study. He was marginalized, unemployed, and struggling to raise a pre-school child on his own with inadequate resources. In other words, his experiences seemed to parallel the experiences of many low-income lone mothers. Considering Mel's situation, I had to ask myself: how was welfare a gendered issue if Mel's experience was no different than the women in my study?

Rethinking Fraser's (1989) analysis of the gendering of welfare states helped me to consider this in a new way. That Mel is male matters less than the fact that he is part of the female sub-system of the welfare state (i.e., social assistance), which gives him an experience paralleling the female experience in many ways. Furthermore, the intersection of race, class and gender become more explicit when thinking about Mel's situation. He may have been male, but his experience as a low-income, underemployed aboriginal lone-father meant that he experienced oppression similarly to the women in this study. What makes social assistance gendered is not that only women can experience the oppression; rather, it is that because they are women, they are more likely to experience the oppression because they are more likely to be single parents, poor, and on social assistance. If a man finds himself in a situation similar to many marginalized women, he is likely to have similar experiences. The intersection of gender with race and class is thus made explicit in this case; and their integrated nature is important. Given that only one lone-father was part of this study, the conclusions raised above are necessarily tentative. In order to explore the theory that the gendering of systems is as important as the gender of those in the systems, further research is required to examine the experience of other marginalized lone fathers in similar situations to Mel.

Finally, the use of a gender lens was helpful in explicating the impacts of welfare-to-work on citizenship entitlements for low-income families. At the onset of this study, I argued that welfare-to-work was a manifestation of a fundamental shift in how we viewed citizenship rights in Canada, moving Canada further from social citizenship, and closer to market citizenship. Considering the shift in citizenship entitlements using a gender lens has brought me to a deeper understanding of the various layers of citizenship and its particular consequences for low-income lone-mother families.

Implications for Citizenship

Feminists have pointed out that although men have long gained their citizenship entitlements through paid work, women have historically been barred from meaningful citizenship because of their exclusion from the labour force through familial policies which limited women to the private sphere (Marshall, 1994; O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999). With this historical context in mind, it seems reasonable that policies which promote labour-force attachment might bring women closer to traditional notion of citizenship through paid work. However, the findings of this study suggest that the focus on labour-force attachment for low-income parents, most of whom are women, actually moves them even further away from citizenship.

Where low-income lone mothers once gained at least some citizenship entitlements from the welfare state, however inadequate and riddled with problems, they are now at risk of losing even those. They are no longer entitled to benefits from the state granted by virtue of social citizenship, nor are they likely to achieve citizenship entitlements through labour-force attachment. Lewis (2000) summarizes this position: "Women are left in a very vulnerable position. Because access to paid and unpaid work, income and resources is profoundly gendered, men and women do not start out equal when it comes to establishing their rights to social citizenship" (p. 48). Low-income women who are forced into labour-force attachment still experience gendered barriers including low paying jobs, and the juggling of paid and unpaid responsibilities. The gender neutral (or gender blind) assumption inherent in welfare-to-work policies will have detrimental consequences for low-income women and consequently put their already fragile citizenship status in further peril.

Even though welfare-to-work has put low-income women's citizenship entitlements at further risk, the findings of this research suggest that welfare-to-work policies nonetheless entail elements worthy of consideration. When I embarked on this study, I held the perspective that active social policy, evidenced by welfare-to-work, was a punitive violation of basic social rights and significant evidence of the end of social citizenship. My encounter with participants of this study, however, has necessitated a more sophisticated and nuanced analysis of welfare-to-work. The shift to welfare-to-work is not as black and white as I originally thought. Rather, there are traces of grey throughout. Reflecting on the experiences of the participants has helped me to expatiate my understanding of this policy direction.

One issue I have contemplated as a result of this study is that the participants want more than basic income support. Rather, participants desire to be part of the labour force. In making a case for the citizenship rights of welfare recipients to social assistance benefits, advocates of income support such as myself may have overlooked this perspective and thus in some ways contributed to denying welfare recipients their individual agency. In advocating for basic income support, poverty researchers have perhaps not considered the desire for people to have purpose in their lives. Although continued emphasis on the structural barriers and constraints for low-income families is crucial, we also need to recognize that people in poverty want to exercise their individual agency and seek opportunities. To discount welfare recipients' aspirations is paternalistic.

Policies which are active and future-oriented may therefore have some merit. Investing in citizens and promoting self-sufficiency are not in themselves problematic, and in many ways are beneficial. Although a critical analysis of my findings supports the claim that welfare-to-work is further putting citizenship rights at risk, it also shows with greater clarity that the traditional welfare state in Canada did not meet the needs of welfare recipients either, particularly lone mothers. Social assistance in Canada, albeit more generous in many provinces historically than it is today, has never provided adequate income. As Baker and Tippin (1999) point out: "[p]aying mothers a social benefit to care for their children at home has not been emancipatory" (p. 47). Collecting social assistance benefits has entailed continued poverty, stigma, and social isolation, as the findings detailed in chapter four suggest.

Policy makers should in no way interpret these reflections on the findings from this research as an endorsement for the current policy direction of today. Acknowledging that welfare recipients hold the same values as other Canadians in their desire to achieve citizenship through paid employment does not lead to a sanctioning of welfare-to-work. Rather, it is a recognition that returning to the way things were in the "golden age" of the welfare state may not be the answer. Returning to the ills of yesteryear is not the solution to the ills of today. With this in mind, I now turn to the implications of this research for welfare policy directions.

Policy praxes for the social investment state

In commenting on the impact of welfare reforms in Canada, Greenwood (2005) has come to the following conclusion: "As it goes forward, welfare reform needs to concentrate less on getting people off welfare and more on lifting people out of poverty" (p. 10). This acumen resonates with the findings from this study about the inability for the majority of participants to move above the Market Basket Measure, with or without employment. So, what are we to do? The findings from this study engender two overarching policy responses. The first is to address barriers to employment and self-sufficiency through better understanding the realities of the lives of lone parents with pre-school children, and finding ways to address challenges. This is what the social investment state is attempting to do through the active policy orientation as manifested in welfare-to-work policies. However, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, it has fallen short.

The second possible response is to enhance income support so that social assistance recipients have adequate incomes, and to offer benefits in a way that eliminates stigma and surveillance through universalizing them in some way. I do not think that these two considerations are antithetical. Rather, I think both policy orientations could run concurrently. Below I use Ann Robertson's "moral economy of interdependence" (Robertson, 1997, 1998, 1999) as a framework in which to propose a vision for a more inclusive notion of citizenship, incorporating elements of the active welfare state as well as arguing for the introduction of a universal basic citizens' income.

Moral economy of interdependence

In deconstructing the politics of need, Robertson (1997; 1998) unfurls an eloquent and challenging critique of the language of needs. She argues that need has been dominated by two discourses – therapeutic language and "rights talk." According to Robertson, therapeutic language fails to capture the essence of need because it is enveloped in individualist discourse which distances people from their social roles and relationships. Drawing upon the work of McKnight (1977), who points out that the therapeutic system of services creates clients instead of citizens, Robertson states that "[a] therapeutic language of need, by locating need in individual 'clients', effectively depoliticizes the problem of human need and renders us all potential clients of the therapeutic state" (1997, p. 430). In short, a therapeutic understanding of need individualizes and depoliticizes the issue.

Like the therapeutic language of need, rights talk is also inadequate because it too is grounded in individualism, and fails to capture the "significance of our common life together and the values of public life" (Robertson, 1998, p. 1425). According to this perspective, rights talk depoliticizes needs because it "acknowledges only persons who make a claim against the collectivity" (1997, 431). Glendon (1991) argues that "our rights-laden public discourse easily accommodates the economic, the immediate and the personal dimensions of a problem, while it regularly neglects the moral, the long-term and the social implications" (as cited in Robertson, 1998, p. 1428). In other words, rights talk decontextualizes a problem. As articulated by Ignatieff (1984): "rights language offers a rich vernacular for the claims an individual may make on or against the collectivity,… [but] it is relatively impoverished as a means of expressing individuals' needs for the collectivity" (p. 13).

Robertson (1998) argues that neither of these discourses adequately captures the essence of need within the context of community, and in fact depoliticizes need. She thus advocates for another alternative, which she calls the moral economy of interdependence. Stone (1984) explains that the concept of "moral economy" is used to describe the subsistence ethic of peasant societies whereby community members believe that all persons are entitled to available resources. Those with a surplus are required by the collective to share with those in need. She argues that the concept of moral economy can also be applied to contemporary societies because moral economy is really about "the boundary between work and need" (p. 19). Stone (1984) explains that

> [t]he moral economy of a society is its set of beliefs about what constitutes just exchange: not only about how economic exchange is to be conducted in normal times but also…when poor individuals are entitled to social aid, when better-off people are obligated to provide aid and what kinds of claims anyone – landowners, employer, governments – can legitimately make on the surplus product of anyone else (p. 19).

Robertson (1998) summarizes this definition, suggesting that the "moral economy is as much about our obligations to one another as it is about the claims we are entitled to make against each other" (p. 1426).

Relating the concept of moral economy to the modern welfare state, Robertson (1998) suggests that the central moral issue is: "when does need entitle people to make a claim against the collective?" (p. 1426). Through institutionalizing "shared assumptions of reciprocity" (in other words a moral economy) Robertson posits that the welfare state in contemporary society "represents an administrative attempt to extend this concept of interdependence to 'the strangers at my door'" (Robertson, 1997, p. 437; quote within quote is Ignatieff, 1984). Because of its focus on interconnectedness, the moral economy of interdependence transcends the dichotomy of dependence and independence (i.e. self-sufficiency) as evident in policies guiding social assistance, as well as general social policy discourse.

Like human ecology theory, the moral economy of interdependence recognizes, and builds upon, the interconnectedness of individuals. In a moral economy of interdependence it is recognized that

> our very individuality exists only as a result of our embeddedness in a network of relationships both private and public. None of us is totally independent of our context – social, political and economic; rather, we are located and live within complex webs of mutual dependence or interdependence (Robertson, 1997, p. 436).

A moral economy of interdependence embodies notions of reciprocity and interconnection. Additionally, Robertson (1998) points out that unlike the Hobbesian view that humans lack moral sense, a moral economy of interdependence mirrors Titmuss' (1973) view that people are caring and want to be connected (as cited in Robertson, 1998, p. 1426). Below I utilize Robertson's conceptual blueprint to suggest a way to create more informed social policy and ultimately a more caring society.

Rethinking welfare policy within a moral economy of interdependence

Rethinking policy directions in the framework of a moral economy of interdependence would, in light of my findings, include several components. It would recognize and acknowledge those aspects of the social investment state that are valuable to citizens. However, it would also reveal the issues and barriers to citizenship in light of particular policy orientations within the social investment state. Importantly, the moral economy of interdependence would recognize that not everyone can be a fully active participant in the social investment state (i.e. participate in paid labour), and would redefine citizenship in a way that values a place for these citizens. These components will be explored below.

Earlier I referred to Saint-Martin's (2000) metaphor of the social investment state as a trampoline which is intended to provide citizens with a springboard of opportunity. As such, the social investment state is positive in a number of respects. Investing in health, education, children, and so on are laudable undertakings. Giving equality of opportunity to citizens is not in itself problematic. Policies which enable equal access to health, education, safe water and safe neighbourhoods are key in a good society. For instance, providing equality of opportunity to a university education through affordable tuition rates for all provides a starting place for students from all walks of life to attend university. However, equality of opportunity is not enough. It is necessary, but not sufficient.

While acknowledging the merits of the social investment state, it must be recognized that equality of opportunity does not work for everyone. To meet the needs of many people, we also need to incorporate equality of outcome, or equity, policies. Here I will use Sharpe's (2003) definition of these terms: "Equality of opportunity refers to non-preferential access to educational and other opportunities for all members of society" whereas "equality of outcome refers to the actual distribution of income and wealth…" (p. S5). Sharpe (2003) points out that "[t]he latter concept does not imply that everyone should have identical amounts of income and wealth, given that people make different occupational and work/leisure choices and have different earnings profiles over the life cycle" (p. S5). However, advocates of equality of outcome recognize that not everyone is starting at the same place and try to compensate for that at least somewhat. To use a racetrack metaphor, if two persons are starting a 100 m dash – one fully able-bodied and another disabled – starting from the exact same start line is not really giving them an equal opportunity. Rather, recognizing the differences between the two and making provisions for the disabled athlete so that s/he might have a fair chance at ending at the same place would be more just.

In relation to welfare policy, roadblocks to self-sufficiency must be recognized *and understood* in all their complexity. As White (2003) argues, what is lacking from the new social-investment state are policies which would address "the changing character of work and families in the society" (p. 71). Rather than address issues regarding the increasingly precarious nature of the labour market or the work/family nexus, policies continue to focus on human capital (White, 2003). Within the framework of a moral economy of interdependence, the interconnectedness of paid work and unpaid work would be acknowledged and factored-in to policy development. From a pragmatic perspective, this study shows that if labour-force attachment is going to be a policy goal for welfare recipients with pre-school children, further measures are required to address the work/family interface. Below I outline these measures.

The findings of this study suggest that facilitating the labour-force attachment of low-income parents is far more complex than it may first appear. First, policy focused on labour-force attachment needs to fully understand and acknowledge the realities of the labour market for low-income workers. As I have argued throughout this study, the problem is not employment per se; rather, it is secure employment which offers a living wage (Gorlick, & Brethour, 1998a; Jenson, 2004; McFarland & Mullaly, 1996; Shillington, 1998). The policy implication of this reality is that the current emphasis on bolstering human capital is inadequate; much more progress could be made by developing policy to ensure that full-time work constitutes a living wage and to increase job security. To this end, policy makers focused on securing labour-force attachment for low-income workers would redirect their gaze to conduct a careful and critical analysis of the labour market itself, rather than continuing to focus exclusively on the human capital of the workers. Reviewing the implications of the deregulated labour market for citizens, rather than exclusively for markets, needs to be factored into an effective social investment state. Investing in citizens also entails creating economic environments where they can utilize their skills and earn wages sufficient to meet their economic and social needs. Jenson (2004) proposes that policies to increase minimum wages, provide benefits to workers in part-time, low-wage, and non-standardized work, and require companies to provide a "living wage" must be explored. Although health benefits are now granted to low-income parents leaving welfare in Alberta, the problem of low-wages, part-time work and non-standard hours were clearly barriers for participants of this study.

Further complicating the issue of labour-force attachment is the work/family nexus. In addition to other studies (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Mason; 2003; Solomon, 2001), findings from this study provide further evidence that the work/family interface has not been adequately considered in developing policy mandating labour-force attachment in low-income families. Policy makers will have to consider how non-standard, precarious jobs will be performed by parents, particularly lone parents. Here the complex nature of childcare comes into play. Effective childcare policy must entail more than childcare subsidy. Available, quality childcare which enhances the well-being of children must be available when paid employment is available. This is easily stated in theory, but very difficult to achieve. As I noted in chapter six, the Alberta government has attempted to address this issue through offering more flexible childcare subsidy for informal childcare arrangements. Although this may appear progressive, concerns have been raised about the quality of childcare in informal, unregulated settings (Jenson, 2003).

This study shows that the juncture at which unpaid caring work and paid employment meet may be very difficult to negotiate for low-income lone-parent families. The unpaid work that happened on the edges of a paid work day, the work outside the work, took considerable time and energy for participants, making it difficult for them to procure and/or sustain employment. These findings suggest that the disintegrated nature of welfare-to-work policies, which overlooks the actualities of low-income parents' daily lives, thus limits families' ability to become self-sufficient. Until policy adequately recognizes and addresses this issue, labour-force attachment will not occur for many low-income parents.

Additionally, policies must reflect understanding that one parent cannot adequately fulfill the roles of parent and employee without adequate supports. In other words, they must acknowledge that parents work and workers parent. Although this is an obvious statement, it still lacks adequate acknowledgement and understanding in active social policies intended to secure labour-market attachment. For low-wage workers, this balance is fragile at best, and unattainable in many instances. Therefore, policy needs to be more cognizant of what is happening in families, and show more compassion and flexibility for lone-parents of pre-school children trying to juggle multiple demands. Recognizing the connection between unpaid caring work and paid work would be consistent with the recognition of interdependence within a moral economy of interdependence.

The findings of this study lead to another policy implication: rather than continuing to unsuccessfully facilitate labour-force attachment for low-income lone mothers of young children, the most effective policy solution for some of the most marginalized low-income parents and their children is simply to provide basic income support. Although this may appear to contradict my previous observation that study participants wanted more than basic income, a layering of policies would both provide basic income and opportunities for additional programs for those who are able to participate.

The experiences of study participants show that policies which address equality of opportunity are not enough for some citizens. Some study participants were not able to be active in the labour market at least for awhile, and others may continue to have problems which preclude labour-market attachment in the long-term. More generally, some individuals and families in our society will require income and social support for a short period of time, and others will need it throughout their lives. Because the social investment state is future oriented, investing in those who hold promise for tomorrow, the outlook for those who will never make what is deemed a significant contribution (i.e. paid employment) is precarious at best. There are those who will never show a positive return on investment. In a moral economy of interdependence, we would not disregard these people as poor investments, but accept as a society that there are some people who we will have to care for.

Could we replace the trampoline and the safety net with an integrated web of policies which both promote equality of opportunity and equality of outcome? Here I am suggesting a system that eliminates the need for a safety net. Below I carve out a proposal to bridge aspects of the social investment state and basic income support. To begin this discussion, I frame this issue within the agency/structure waltz to attempt to think about the linkages between active social policy and basic income support in a new way which I call "the gortex solution".

Rethinking the agency/structure waltz: The gortex solution

Recently, I was cross-country skiing in temperatures of -23 C. It was cold. Yet, out in the middle of nowhere, kilometers from the security of a warm building or a vehicle, I felt safe and warm. Whenever I find myself in this situation, I marvel at the power of the human body to overcome the elements. This time I began to think about the structure/agency waltz so central to current thinking in social science. A good winter, in my view, entails lots of snow, offering endless possibilities for enjoyable recreational pursuits. I also recognize, however, that winter entails cold and potentially life-threatening weather. In short, winter, like societal structures, offers opportunity and constraints. As an individual, I am able to overcome the constraints, and engage in the opportunities, but not without considerable resources. Without expensive clothing designed to protect my body from wind and cold, I would not last more than a few minutes. Other less immediate resources such as good equipment enabling me to pursue this activity in the first place, a constant supply of nutritional food, a warm home and an endless supply of hot water to ward off après-ski chills also contribute to my well-being. In other words, my agency to overcome the weather and take the opportunity to engage in recreational pursuits depends upon considerable external resources.

I think that this illustration can be used to think about social policy in a different light. Instead of a safety net which catches us when we fall, or a trampoline that springs us upward, we need social policy that would be like the gortex solution to frigid weather. The gortex solution encompasses both the safety net (recognizing and protecting us from our vulnerability to the elements) and the trampoline (enabling us to take hold of opportunities if we are otherwise able). It offers protection and opportunity. To this end, I propose that a citizens' basic income should be one component of the gortex solution, providing protection from economic vulnerability to citizens. It would be accompanied by a layer of social policy as envisioned in the social investment state, offering opportunity to those who can partake.

Citizenship revisited: Citizens' basic income

McKay (2001) uses the term citizens' basic income (CBI)[14] to refer to a basic income offered as a universal entitlement "paid at a level deemed sufficient to meet basic needs" to all citizens without any linkages to labour market participation (p. 99). McKay points out that a citizens' basic income is particularly important for women, given their

> historically limited access to the labor market and their lower earnings relative to those of men….the increase in single-parent households (predominately headed by women), women's longer life expectancy, and the unpaid work undertaken primarily by women in providing welfare within the household" (p. 103).

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[14] It must be noted that the notion of a CBI (referred to as a guaranteed annual income in the Canadian context) is not a new idea in Canada. Throughout the history of social policy in Canada, this idea has reemerged a number of times in various forms but never been fully implemented. For a comprehensive historical review of the notion of a guaranteed annual income in Canada, see the Government of Canada (1994).

She argues that a citizens' basic income would address the conundrum of women's continued marginalization within the labour market by providing an independent income separate from earnings from employment (McKay, 2001). A citizens' basic income as proposed by McKay would achieve two goals outlined by Eichler (1997) in her feminist model of social responsibility: it would be universal and gender-sensitive. Below I propose an initiative that incorporates the principles of universality and gender sensitivity, but offers these principles in a way that might be considered viable to contemporary governments, given their interests with both fiscal constraint and investing in the future.

Here I suggest that a citizens' basic income would be developed according to a "universal logic" rather than targeted solely to low-income individuals and families. According to Jenson (2004), a universal logic is preferable to a targeted approach. She explains: "[t]argeting too many programs to the poor may actually undermine the legitimacy of such programs, because middle-class taxpayers (caught between high costs and their own straitened incomes) wonder whether anyone is thinking about *their* needs" (Jenson, 2004, p. 37). Furthermore, when programs are universal rather than targeted there is less stigma attached to receiving benefits than when social programs are highly targeted (Rice & Prince, 2000).

The universal logic applied here would not be based on the notion of equality as sameness, however. Rather, it would incorporate a feminist understanding of equality which recognizes systemic barriers to equality based on gender, class and race and addresses them. It would recognize, for instance, the significance of gender differentiation in the labour market and in the care of children and factor these issues into development of the citizens' basic income. I argue here that this could be achieved through "progressive universalism" where there is "something for all but more for the poorest" (Pawlick & Stroick, 2004 as cited in Jenson, 2004, p. 37). According to this approach, only the most impoverished citizens would receive the full benefits, with others taxing back their benefits according to their other income sources. This would achieve the advantages of universalism, but enable a situation where those who need more get more.

There will likely be criticisms of this view from both sides of the political spectrum. Those who advocate for pure universality will argue that this is a targeted program in the guise of a universal program. In part, this is true. However, my response to this critique is that it incorporates a feminist understanding of equality and creates a situation in which the level of the benefit can be impactful for low-income people, while still having buy-in from middle-income Canadians because they are also getting a share of the pie. While it is accurate to say that family allowance was purely universal, in the end the amounts were so minimal that they did not significantly benefit anyone. However, with progressive universalism, all can benefit. Progressive universalism operates under a more sophisticated notion of equality, such as feminists embrace. It recognizes that to treat people equally is not always to treat them the same.

The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) is instructive here. This program operates under the principal of quasi-universalism (Jenson, 2004) rather than progressive universalism as it is given on a sliding scale according to income rather than taxed-back. However, because approximately 80% of Canadian families receive some portion of it (Jenson, 2004), it operates according to a universal logic. It is noteworthy that several participants in this study lived on the CCTB for periods of time, some because they had been cut-off of social assistance, and for others because they did not want to deal with the surveillance associated with social assistance. Interestingly, for these participants, the CCTB did not seem to carry the stigma associated with social assistance benefits. I posit that the reason for this lack of stigma among the participants is because of the quasi-universal nature of the program.

On the other hand, fiscal conservatives will likely argue that a citizens' basic income is not affordable or sustainable. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to develop the economics of this; rather, this proposal is speculative. I leave this as a loose end for others who understand economics better than I, and who can make a compelling argument for this. However, several points are worth noting. First, various income support programs already exist including social assistance, old age security, employment insurance, the Canada Child Tax Benefit and others. These programs could provide a foundation upon which to develop a citizens' basic income. If these income support programs were rolled into one program, there would be substantial savings in administrative needs. Second, if a citizens' basic income was based on the logic of "progressive universalism", only the poorest citizens would receive the full benefit, thereby increasing the sustainability of the program. Third, "there is a growing international consensus that meeting social goals can contribute to economic efficiency and progress and is a good investment in the knowledge-based economy" (Jenson, 2004, p. 36). The thinking behind this notion is that addressing social needs leads to improved human capital, which in turn leads to greater social capital, which is good for economic growth. Finally, I refer to Ralston Saul (1995) who points out that although claims are continually made that there is no money for social programs, there is more money in society than ever before. When the government says there is no money, what it is really saying is that they lack the will or support from the corporate sector to implement such a plan.

In summary, if we have basic income as a starting point, we could potentially eliminate the need for a safety net because citizens would not be in a position to need rescuing. With an adequate citizens' basic income as well as other universal programs such as healthcare, education, and childcare, social assistance would become largely unnecessary. This layering of policies could protect those who fall off the trampoline, as well as those who cannot get on it to begin with. Like gortex, it would provide protection, prevention and opportunity.

The pitch for a citizen's basic income is speculative and exploratory. Much more thought and research needs to go into the development of such a plan. My musings on the citizen's basic income are not intended to be comprehensive, but rather a starting place for future discussions. I raise it here as a policy alternative, because I think that it is important not only to critique where we have been and where we are headed, but to envision where we want to go. It seems to me that in a society based upon the recognition of interconnection as in Robertson's (1998) moral economy of interdependence, a citizen's basic income would be a good policy move.

Implications for research and theory

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study is the examination of the complex ways that various policies interact. Particularly, the examination of the juncture at which social assistance policy meets childcare policies has shown how the disintegrated nature of policies impacts people attempting to navigate various systems. These findings point to the need for a more ecological, or holistic, understanding about the ways in which a range of policies impact low-income families. The lack of integration of various policies, such as income support policies, childcare policies, child welfare policies and housing policies, may have detrimental impacts on low-income families, hindering rather than facilitating the goal of self-sufficiency through labour-market attachment. Studying these policies ecologically – through looking at the ways in which they are integrated and inter-connected – could explicate the ways in which they inadvertently collide, revealing more clearly the subsequent effects upon marginalized families.

The findings of this study also suggest the need for research methodologies and theories that allow for the examination of complex and interconnected phenomenon in their entirety. The various ways in which ideology and policy intersect and overlap to shape the experiences of participants suggest that these relationships need to be examined holistically in all their messiness. Ursula Franklin (1990) poignantly encapsulates the predicament of scientific research. She states:

> Science, by its very nature, separates knowledge from experience. This is its strength, as it moves from the specific to the general, in order to derive laws considered applicable to all appropriate situations. However, this separation is also science's greatest weakness.

This does not discount the need for methodologies that break components of a problem down into digestible sizes in order to scrutinize them as this approach serves to isolate particular variables in order to begin to piece together complex phenomenon. However, there is also room for research that attempts to look at the whole labyrinth of problems with their complex interconnections. Studying research problematics ecologically is one such way to accomplish this.

With an increased recognition of the interconnection of individuals and systems, human ecology as a discipline has an excellent opportunity to develop theoretically and in practice. Westney, Brabble and Edwards (1988) state that "[a]lthough human ecology is a young discipline, it is an essential and viable one. Moreover, it is a discipline whose time has come" (p. 137). As we continue to grapple with the impacts of ideological and policy shifts, human-ecological theorizing has the potential to add greatly to the understanding of societal complexities as we look at micro and macro environments within the global context. It is within the human ecological framework that we have an opportunity to explore complex phenomenon such as poverty with more sophisticated theorizing.

The findings of this study have answered some questions, but left others unanswered. Perhaps the biggest question is this: how do we create a stronger bridge between research and policy? When I reviewed the policies impacting welfare recipients, I noted that in theory some of them seemed quite comprehensive. Yet, I learned that practically they did not meet many of the needs of people they impacted. The disconnect between the policies made by well-intentioned policy makers and the experiences of participants needs to be addressed. A key problem in moving forward on social issues is that although there is considerable knowledge and insightful suggestions for improving the lives of marginalized individuals, there are ample policies that do not reflect that knowledge. Perhaps our biggest challenge as applied social science researchers is to explore how we can best address this. More research is needed to explicate the linkages between policy and day-to-day experience and then find creative ways to open the dialogue with governments and policy makers.

Conclusion

The findings of this study present a rather gloomy portrayal about the future for low-income citizens, given the current social policy trends. Despite this bleak forecast, I would like to conclude with three points which shine a small ray of hope on the future of low-income Canadians. First, cross-national comparative studies have shown that the continued poverty for lone-parent families is not inevitable but a result of policy choices. Historical influences and collective action shape the policy choices that are made in various countries, and show us that policy directions are not inescapable (Benoit, 2000; Sainsbury, 1996). Comparative literature that examines the relationships between and among gender, work, income, health and social policy shows that better income and health outcomes for lone-parent mothers are possible (Curtis & Phipps, 2004; Sainsbury, 1996). Through a critical examination of different policy alternatives cross-nationally, we can stimulate new ideas about the approach that Canada might take in addressing current social problems such as poverty.

Second, I want to suggest that although government policies seem less compassionate than ever before, this is not necessarily reflective of a lack of compassion or support by general citizens. Although there is little research to reveal what the Canadian public thinks about poverty-related policies, one Canadian study by Reutter, Harrison and Neufeld (2002) considered how the public views the linkages between poverty and health, and predicted support for policies relevant to poverty. Findings showed that two-thirds of the public chose a structural explanation to account for the relationship between poverty and health whereas only 16.8% chose a behavioural explanation. In regard to support for government funding for particular programs, Reutter et al. (2002) found that the strongest support was for childcare programs, housing, wage subsidies for the working poor, and nutritional programs. Less support was indicated for income support. However, the findings from this study suggest that there may be more public support for poverty-related policies than is reflected by current public policy.

My third point is related to the out-pouring of support demonstrated when the boxing day tsunami of 2004 hit Asia. The response to this crisis serves as an illustration that Canadians do think and act beyond their own self-interest. Within three weeks of the disaster, the world had collectively donated over six billion dollars. The Canadian government pledged $80 million, and Canadian private donations were $150 million and climbing (Mansbridge, January 13, 2005). Fund-raising activities sprang-up throughout the country. The immediate and impactful response to this disaster suggests several things. First, people do care. However, it is the crisis situations, highlighted by the media that get a response. A similar response occurs locally at Christmas, where many people give their time and money to help "the less fortunate" within our society. Yet the ongoing day-to-day struggles and suffering go unnoticed. Our ability to sustain the momentum to act in these situations fizzles away.

I have reflected on why there has been such an outpouring of support for this disaster. Various theories have been raised by others. Some media commentators have speculated that the intensive media coverage has brought the disaster into our living rooms, our cars, and our offices minute by minute, requiring that we reflect upon the disaster in an immediate way. Others have suggested that one of the reasons for such a strong response to this crisis is that westerners could see themselves on the beaches of Thailand or Indonesia. In other words, they could connect with the people there. Still others have said that the in a natural disaster such as this, the vulnerability and innocence of people is clear.[15] There is no room to blame them for their bad luck.

Although all points likely have some merit, it is the third point that I find most compelling. Here I will venture into territory I know little about: social psychology. When terrible situations occur, I think we protect ourselves from our own vulnerability by blaming people for their misfortune. If, for instance, we learn about a terrible single-vehicle car accident, we may somehow be comforted to learn that the cause of the accident was most certainly driving under the influence of alcohol. We can think to ourselves: "avoid drinking and driving, and this will not happen to you." A certain amount of individual agency comes with doing this. If I can explain the dire situation of someone else through identifying the fact that they created their own situation, I can believe that I am protected from a similar calamity. However, if the situation is such where there is no room for individualizing the problem, such as in the case of the tsunami, we are more likely to connect with others in our most basic humanity. In other words, through creating a clear separation between deserving and undeserving victims, we can have a sense of control and limit our own sense of vulnerability with all the unknowns we face. What I am trying to say is this: people do care, but in trying to protect themselves from harm or misfortune, they blame others for their misfortune whenever possible.

The ray of light in all this is that if we can demonstrate that issues like poverty have structural roots that are preventable through good public policy, perhaps we can tap into people's latent compassion and generosity and propel them not only to sporadically donate to charity, but to push governments into action to find enduring solutions. How this will come about is a subject for future work. Studying when and why people show their care and concern may be the first step in identifying how to revolutionize public policy in a way that genuinely ensures the social citizenship of impoverished families and ultimately benefits all of us.

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[15] For a broad range of views from a variety of journalistic commentators, see www.cbc.ca/disaster in Asia

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Appendix A
Recruitment Poster

QUAECUMQUE VERA

Welfare To Work
RESEARCH PROJECT

WELFARE REFORM

is happening in Alberta. A group of researchers at the University of Alberta is trying to learn what is happening to families on social assistance during these changes. We will make recommendations to the government based on what we learn from people who take part in our study. This study is not being done on behalf of a government agency or department.

Volunteers are Needed

to take part in a study about what it's like to move from welfare to work. We would like to talk to people with pre-school children who have been on social assistance for the last six months and have recently started life skills, a school program, a training program, or a job.

If you would like to share your experiences in moving from welfare to work, please contact Fiona at 492-1651.

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

Appendix B

Welfare to Work: A Critical Ethnographic Inquiry
Information Sheet for Agencies and Community Contact People

Purpose of the Study:
By doing this study, we hope to find out what is has been like for people moving from welfare to work so that we can make suggestions to the government for policy improvements.

Who is doing the Study:
A group of researchers at the University of Alberta:

- Kim Raine; R.D., PhD; Associate Professor, Centre for Health Promotion Studies & Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutritional Sciences
- Deanna Williamson; PhD; Assistant Professor, Department of Human Ecology
- Rhonda Breitkreuz; MA; PhD Student, Department of Human Ecology

The study is not being done on behalf of any government agency or department.

Methods:
Participants will be interviewed three times over one year. The reason for doing three interviews is to find out about families' experiences with their change from welfare to work throughout the year.

The interviewer will ask participants about what it is like to move off of welfare into life skills, job training, school, work programs, or work. Participants will be asked questions they can answer in their own words. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

Confidentiality:
The interviews will be recorded with a tape recorder and typed out by a person working at the university. The name of the participant will not be connected with anything he or she says. Only people that are working on this study will hear the tapes and read the typed copy of the tape. All of the information recorded and typed will be locked in a cabinet.

It is the law that any information about child abuse or abuse by a service provider must be reported. This is the only information that cannot be kept confidential.

Benefits:
This study will probably not have any direct benefit for the participants. However, we hope that we will learn more about the experiences of people who are making the change from welfare to work. These findings will be used to give information to

people in the government who make decisions about policies that affect people with low-incomes.

As a token of appreciation, the interviewer will give participants a $20.00 Safeway or IGA gift certificate at the end of each interview. If families take part in all aspects of the larger

research project, they will be entered into a prize draw. Prizes will include food baskets, hair-products, pottery or other like gifts.

Risks:
We do not anticipate that taking part in this study will harm the participants in any way. If a participant feels upset while talking in the interview, the interviewer will talk to the participant more about this and give additional referrals if needed.

Withdrawal from the Study:
We hope that the participants will be able to be involved with the study until it is finished. However, even after a participant has agreed to do an interview, s/he may decide that s/he does not want to take part any more. This is his/her decision. If a participant completes the first interview and then decides s/he doesn't want to do any more interviews, s/he may stop at this time. If the participant decides that s/he does not want the researchers to use what s/he said, they will not use it. Withdrawing from the project will not affect a participant's financial benefits in any way.

Use of This Information:
The information collected from participants will be used to understand better what it is like for people who move from welfare to work. This information will be used to give the government suggestions about how to improve policies and programs about welfare. The information will also be published and presented at conferences, and it will be used by graduate students for their Master's thesis and PhD dissertation research. None of the reports, publications, or presentations about the study will ever include participants' names or identifying information. The information gathered for this study may be looked at again in the future to help us answer other study questions. If so, the Ethics Committee will first review the study to ensure the information is used ethically. If your agency wishes to get a short copy of the report when it is completed, we will mail it to you.

Welfare to Work: A Critical Ethnographic Inquiry
Information Sheet for Participants

Purpose of the Study:
By doing this study, we hope to find out what is has been like for people moving from welfare to work so that we can make suggestions to the government for policy improvements.

Who is doing the Study:
A group of researchers at the University of Alberta is doing this study. The study is not being done on behalf of any government agency or department.

Methods:
If you take part in this study, you will be interviewed three times over one year. The reason for doing three interviews is to find out how things are going with your change from welfare to work throughout the year.

The interviewer will ask you about what it is like to move off of welfare into life skills, job training, school, work programs or work. You will be asked questions you can answer in your own words. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

Confidentiality:
The interviews will be recorded with a tape recorder and typed out by a person working at the university. Your name will not be connected with anything you say. Only people that are working on this study will hear the tapes and read the typed copy of the tape. All of the information recorded and typed will be locked in a cabinet.

It is the law that any information about child abuse or abuse by a service provider must be reported. This is the only information that cannot be kept confidential.

Benefits:
This study will probably not have any direct benefit for you. However, we hope that we will learn more about the experiences of people who are making the change from welfare to work. These findings will be used to give information to people in the government who make decisions about policies that affect people with low-incomes.

As a token of appreciation, the interviewer will give you a $20.00 Safeway or IGA gift certificate at the end of each interview. If you take part in all aspects of the larger research project, you wil be entered into a prize draw. Prizes will include food baskets, hair-products, pottery or other like gifts.
Risks:

We do not anticipate that taking part in this study will harm you in any way. If you feel upset while you talk to the interviewer, she will talk to you more about this and find additional people to help you if needed.

Withdrawal from the Study:
We hope that you will be able to be involved with the study until it is finished. However, even after you have agreed to do an interview, you may decide that you do not want to take part any more. This is your decision. If you complete the first interview and then decide you don't want to do any more interviews, you may stop at this time. If you decide that you do not want the researchers to use what you said, they will not use it. Withdrawing from the project will not affect your financial benefits in any way.

Use of This Information:

The information collected from you will be used to understand better what it is like for people who move from welfare to work. This information will be used to give the government suggestions about how to improve policies and programs about welfare. The information will also be published and presented at conferences, and it will be used by graduate students for their Master's thesis and PhD dissertation research. None of the reports, publications, or presentations about the study will ever include your name and identifying information. The information gathered for this study may be looked at again in the future to help us answer other study questions. If so, the Ethics Committee will first review the study to ensure the information is used ethically. If you wish to get a short copy of the report when it is completed, we will mail it to you.

Appendix C
Low-Income Cut Offs

[illegible]

	Population of Community of Residence				
Family Size	**500,000 +**	**100,000-499,999**	**30,000-99,999**	**Less than 30,000***	**Rural**
1	$18,371	$15,757	$15,648	$14,561	$12,696
2	$22,964	$19,697	$19,561	$18,201	$15,870
3	$28,560	$24,497	$24,326	$22,635	$19,738
4	$34,572	$29,653	$29,448	$27,401	$23,892
5	$38.646	$33,148	$32,917	$30,629	$26,708
6	$42,719	$36,642	$36,387	$33,857	$29,524
7 +	$46,793	$40,137	$39,857	$37,085	$32,340

Low-income Cut-Offs (LICOs), 2001

	Population of Community of Residence				
Family Size	**500,000 +**	**100,000-499,999**	**30,000-99,999**	**Less than 30,000***	**Rural**
1	$18,841	$16,160	$16,048	$14,933	$13,021
2	$23,551	$20,200	$20,060	$18,666	$16,275
3	$29,290	$25,123	$24,948	$23,214	$20,242
4	$35,455	$30,411	$30,200	$28,101	$24,502
5	$39,633	$33,995	$33,758	$31,412	$27,390
6	$43,811	$37,579	$37,317	$34,722	$30,278
7 +	$47,988	$41,163	$40,875	$38,033	$33,166

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development, 2002.

Appendix D
Interview Guide

Below is a preliminary interview guide. We anticipate that a number of these questions will be used in all three interviews. However, the second and third interview guides will be revised in response to issues raised by participants in preceding interviews.

Interview Description:

- Remind participant of the purpose of the research project
- Review consent forms (1st interview only)
- Describe the purpose of the interview
- Explain the use of the tape recorder; remind the participant that it may be turned off at their request
- Remind re: confidentiality

Anticipated topic areas to be covered in ethnographic questioning:

- Can you tell me about/describe the current work-related/school/training program(s) or job(s) you are taking part in?
  - What are the reasons that you are taking part in this/these particular programs? (voluntary, mandatory)
  - Work conditions (hours, pay, flexibility, benefits)?
- Can you tell me about your experiences of moving from welfare to work (or job training, school…)? Maybe you can start by just talking about what you do in a normal day. (1st interview). *In subsequent interviews, the questions will be revised to discuss experience of adjusting to the change, or (if appropriate) experience with moving from work back to welfare*
- How have these changes you have been describing affected your family and your children?
  - Economically? (pay vs. welfare, additional expenses incurred, benefits lost…)
  - Child care arrangements? (self vs. other, cost, perceived quality of care, stability of care, children's comfort with arrangements, parents' comfort with arrangements)
  - Family functioning? (parent-child interactions, child-child interactions)
  - Emotionally? (stress levels, feelings of self-worth, balancing multiple roles)
  - Physically? (personal energy levels, self-rated health, perceived children's health – frequency of minor ailments such as colds etc., impact on existing chronic conditions – if applicable)
- What changes to the work-related/school/training program(s) or job(s) do you think would help you to make the transition from welfare to work?

At the conclusion of the interview, thank the participant for their time, and discuss potential times for future interviews.

Appendix E
Stages of Data Coding

Stage One
May, 2003
Codes Developed From Research Questions

1. ***Health & Well-being***
    a. Mental health
        i. Stress
            1. Financial
        ii. Depression
        iii. Anxiety
    b. Physical health problems
    c. Health of children

2. ***Family Functioning***
    a. Recreation
    b. Relationships with other family members
    c. Intimate Relationships
    d. Parent-child relationships
    e. Day-to-day

3. ***Childcare***

4. ***Survival Strategies***
    a. Budgeting
    b. Social support
    c. Financial Issues

5. ***Welfare***
    a. SFI
    b. Welfare to work
    c. Perspectives on

6. ***Policy***

7. ***Human Capital***
    a. Income (source, amount)
    b. Level of Education
    c. Employment status
    d. Housing
    e. Number of children
    f. Age

Coding: Stage Two
Inputted in N'Vivo
June - July, 2003
Codes added/expanded/changed based on reading of transcripts (codes in *italics* added)

NODE LISTING

Nodes in Set: All Tree Nodes
Created: 07/05/2003
Number of Nodes: 12 overarching nodes
29 sub-nodes

1. **Welfare**
    - welfare to work
    - perspectives on welfare

2. **Health and well-being**
    - child health
    - mental health
        - *mental health/stress/relationship (domestic violence)*
        - *mental health/stress/welfare~welfare to work*
        - mental health/depression
        - health/mental health/anxiety
    - physical health
        - addictions
        - health behaviours
    - *stigma*
        - *feeling stigmatized*
        - *stigmatizing others*
    - *food*

3. **Family Functioning**
    - recreation
    - relationship with other family members
    - intimate relationships
    - parent-child relationships
    - day-to-day

4. **Childcare**
    - *Childcare subsidy*

5. **Survival strategies**
    - social support
    - budgeting
    - financial issues

6. **Human Capital**
    a. level of education
    b. number of children
    c. age
    d. housing (info added from all three points of data collection)
    e. income
    f. employment

7. **Policy**

8. ***Sense of purpose***

9. ***Impact of Income Increase***

10. ***Dominant discourse***

11. ***Interviewing process***

12. ***Quotes***

Coding: Stage Three
August 2003

Re-grouping of codes/codes added when re-reading transcripts

1. Merge welfare and survival strategies
    - Control/future
    - Pay the rent or feed the kids
    - Food
    - Stigma (from health)
    - *Social isolation*

2. Separate out transition from welfare-to-work
    - Impact of on well-being
        - Stress
        - Sense of purpose
        - Impact of increased income
        - Family functioning
        - Childcare
        - *Work/family role conflict*
    - Impact on employment/income (from human capital code)
        - Lack of living wage
        - Employment conditions
        - Perspectives on what would help (policy code)

Coding: Stage Four
January – April 2004

Recoding of welfare-to-work
- Sense of purpose
- Impact of Increased Income
    - Possible theme: money buys happiness
- New Code added: *Breaks Isolation*

Reviewing Coding and Developing Final Themes: Stage Five
March-May, 2004

Code: Health
Theme: Health problems

Codes: welfare, survival strategies,control, stigma, pay the rent or feed the kids
Theme: Welfare sucks

Codes: Welfare-to-work (sub codes: sense of purpose, impact of increased income, breaks isolation)
Theme: The promise

Codes: human capital, lack of living wage, employment conditions
Theme: Outcomes in income and employment

Codes: family-functioning & childcare
Theme: Work outside the work: work/family conflict

Overarching theme for above: The reality

Appendix F
Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

April 2, 2001

Dr. K. Raine
AFNS
4-10 AgFor Centre

Dear Dr. Raine:

Re: Ethics Proposal 01-14 Welfare-to-Work: A Critical Ethnographic Inquiry

The Human Research Ethics Board has reviewed your revisions to the above proposal, and it has now been approved.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Norah Keating
Chair
Human Research Ethics Board

Cc Dr. D. Williamson
Ms R. Breitkreuz

Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics
2-14 Agriculture-Forestry Centre • University of Alberta • Edmonton • Alberta, Canada • T6G 2P5
Telephone: (780) 492-4931 • Fax: (780) 492-0097
www.afhe.ualberta.ca • e-mail: dean.agforhe@ualberta.ca

Appendix G
Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Welfare to Work: A Critical Ethnographic Inquiry

Investigators:

a) Rhonda Breitkreuz, Graduate Research Assistant, Welfare-to-Work Project, ph: 492-1651.
b) Dr. Kim Raine, Associate Professor, Centre for Health Promotion Studies & Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutritional Sciences, ph: 492-9415.
c) Dr. Deanna Williamson, Assistant Professor, Department of Human Ecology, ph: 492-5770.

Consent:
Please answer the following questions by circling yes or no.

Do you understand that you have been asked to take part in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you received a copy of the Information Sheet about the study?	Yes	No
Has the study been explained to you by the interviewer?	Yes	No
Do you understand the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?	Yes	No
Have you been able to ask questions about the study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you can stop taking part in this study at any time and that you do not have to give a reason?	Yes	No
Has confidentiality been explained to you?	Yes	No
Do you understand who will be able to access the tapes or written notes from what you said?	Yes	No
Do you understand what the information will be used for?	Yes	No
Do you agree to have your interview tape recorded?	Yes	No
Is it okay for the researchers to talk to you at a later time about taking part in another aspect of the research project?	Yes	No

The person who can be contacted about this study is if you have questions or concerns:

Rhonda Breitkreuz
Phone: [redacted]

This study was explained to me by: ______________________________

I agree to take part in this study.

______________________________ Date ______________________
Signature of Participant Date Witness

______________________ ______________________
Printed Name Printed Name

I am confident that the participant who has signed this form understands what is involved in participating in this study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

____
Signature of Investigator

Copy of the Report:

Would you like to receive a summary of the report? Yes No

If you would like a copy, please write down a mailing address where we can send this report. Your address will not be used for any other reason than to send you this report.

Apt #: _______ Street Address: ____________________________

Town/City: ________________________ Province ___________

Postal Code: ___________________

Appendix H
Summaries of Participant Experiences

Penny

Penny is a 41-year old Caucasian woman with a 5-year old son. She has a grade 10 education. Most of her work experience has been in waitressing, however, she has not done this job for several years because she has a chronic back problem. She has been on SFI on and off (mostly on) since 1993. During this time, she has done waitressing while on SFI, and been through another welfare-to-work program. She has been on SFI medical status a number of times while on SFI, and was in fact on SFI medical status when I first met her due to her back problem. For a number of years, Penny has lived in a one bedroom basement suite in the inner city. Because she wants her son to have his own room, she has her bed in the living room.

Penny initiated her own way into her welfare-to-work program. Because she was on SFI medical status at the time she entered, she did not technically have to do the program. However, she knew that in a full-time welfare-to-work program, she could qualify for student finance, which would increase her income significantly (from approximately $1000 month to $1600). So, she talked to her ECSS worker and enrolled herself in a full-time welfare-to-work program. Through her program Penny was able to get a full-time job as a picture framer, from 9-5, Monday to Friday, making $8 per hour. She describes her job and employer as wonderful. She does not have benefits, but she gets a one hour break a day, and has a very kind employer. She works for a small 'mom & pop' company and she is the only employee. She is very pleased with her job. She started working there for work experience in November, and started getting paid full-time in January, 2002. When I saw her in June, 2002, she was still working there and still pleased with this.

Penny has a number of health problems. In addition to chronic back pain, she has asthma and has suffered from depression since her son was born. She is also an alcoholic, although she has been sober for approximately 9 years. She is a smoker. Penny's son also has significant health problems. He has been diagnosed with ADHD, turrets, and pre-schizophrenic symptoms. He is on medication for these health problems. Penny won't use the food bank, but she has received food and other supplies from the Head Start program that her son was in. She had her son on a very strict, sugar-free diet, but took him off of this because it wasn't helping anyway.

Penny describes herself as a very good budgeter. To survive, she engages in a lot of bargain shopping (ie., second-hand stores and cheap Tuesday at Save-on). She takes a bus to the store, gets her large order, and takes a taxi back for $5. She takes advantage of free programs. For example, she was able to get her son a free bike through a program designed to give recreational equipment to low-income families. She also keeps an 'emergency fund' because she believes that all parents need one.

Because Penny is from another province, she does not have any family here. She describes her supports as AA, Handicapped Chldren's Services (who offer her son respite care on the weekend and extra support for childcare), and the head start program her son was in. She feels that she interacts well with her son. She learned parenting skills at the Family Centre and uses methods such as giving choices and time-outs.

Penny has full-time subsidized child care. She has had some challenges with childcare/school, however, as her son was 'kicked-out' of the last kindergarten program he was in. After this experience, she used private childcare, and when I last met her had her son in a day home that she was pleased with. Her parent portion is about $120 per month. Her son was going to start school in September of 2002.

Her day-to-day schedule is as follows: she gets up at 6:15 am and walks her son to school/childcare. She is on the bus to work by 8:15 am and arrives at work at 8:40 am to start for 9:00 am. She leaves work at 5:00 am and gets home between 5:30-5:45 am. She describes her recreation as needle-point, and states that her son gets his recreation at school.

When I asked her about the future, Penny indicated that she didn't think about it.

Penny indicated that she like the interview process. She liked the opportunity to share with someone what her life was like on a daily basis. She indicated that having the tape-recorder playing was 'weird'. She thanked me for giving her 'the time' and indicated that she was comfortable talking to me. She said that she appreciated that I didn't condemn the way she lived.

Penny thinks that welfare-to-work is great, and was quite critical of others on welfare.

Barbara

Barbara is a 21-year old woman with a one-year old son. She got pregnant at age 19. She has a grade 9 education with a few high school credits. She is not longer with her son's dad. She went onto SFI when she was six months pregnant and moved to Edmonton from another city. She got her own place (subsidized housing unit) and became involved with a pre-employment program which she has found to be very supportive. Upon completing this program, she got involved with a 6 month federal employment initiative, where she was paid $240 per week to work in a school as a teacher's aid. After completing the program, she was hired at the school part-time to continue with her aid work. In the summers, she works at carnivals. This year she is leaving her son with her sister to do this. Each year she has to reapply to get her teacher's aid job back, so she has little job security. She is having another baby in January and doesn't know if she'll qualify for EI. Whatever happens, she doesn't want to go back onto SFI again. She was hoping to go to night school to get an official teacher's aid certificate. This would give her increased pay and more job security. However, because she is pregnant, she will have to delay this plan for awhile.

She describes her health as very good, although she is overweight. She feels that she and her son eat well – lots of vegetables and no sugar. She is very resourceful and shops very carefully to get good prices. She is very careful about what she feeds her son – no pop or junk food. She doesn't smoke or drink. She's had several unplanned pregnancies – one which ended in miscarriage after an abusive boyfriend threw her down the stairs, and one D&C after no foetal movement was detected.

She describes her social support as positive. Her parents both help her out – her mom gives her food, and her dad buys her other things such as furniture. She has had two boyfriends since I met her – the first one ended up being very abusive, and she broke up with the second one, although they are trying to reconcile since she learned of her pregnancy. She views the welfare-to-work programs she's been in as very positive – she sees tremendous personal growth in herself since completing these programs – she has more confidence and more skills.

When I first met Barbara her son was in a drop-in daycare. Upon getting a full-time job in the federal welfare-to-work initiative, Barbara put her son into full-time daycare. The daycare was completely subsidized, including the parent portion. Barbara views this daycare experience as very positive. Her son is doing well there, interacting with other children, and gets fed breakfast, lunch and several snacks throughout the day. She thinks he is better in daycare than with her, because he gets to play with other children.

She describes her relationship with her son as very positive. In the final interview with Barbara, she said she spent more time with her son because she was only working part-time. She saw this as ideal because he went to daycare half-time and she was able to spend time with him in the afternoons. She thinks she is a better parent now than a year ago – she has more patience with her son, and does more with him. Six months ago she was more stressed (working full-time and dealing with an abusive ex-boyfriend) and she therefore put her son in daycare as long as she could each day.

She sees her life as much better now than a year ago. She attributes much of this to the welfare-to-work programs she was in. She learned a lot about herself, gained work experience, got off of SFI, and had more money. She really likes working and hopes to secure a job as a teachers' aid. She is worried about the future, however, with the arrival of a new baby. She does not know how she will support herself financially when the baby is born.

Trudy

Trudy is 25-year old aboriginal woman and has 4 children, ages 20-months to 8-years old. She has been on SFI since 1996, although there was a period in there when she was on student finance from 1998 to 1999. When I met her she had a grade 11 education, and at the end of the interviewing process, she had finished her grade 12 equivalency at an upgrading college. As of September, 2002, she was starting a program in business administration. She had wanted to be a welder, but her reserve didn't fund the trades. Since leaving SFI, she has received school funding from her reserve (not student finance).

Her income from SFI and child tax was about $1500 for four children. Her funding from the reserve grant and child tax was about $2200. She indicated that since she has more money, she can buy a better variety of foods, and more fruit. Consequently, her children eat more because they like the food, and are healthier.

Trudy is very thin. She indicates that she has experienced bouts of depression and stress, depending on how her life was going. She indicated that she experiences a great deal of fatigue, which she attributed to being on 'the birth control patch'. Her older children are generally healthy, although her youngest child has RSV (a respiratory disease). Interestingly, Trudy indicated that since she stopped smoking in her house, and allows no one else to smoke, her baby's health has improved substantially.

For support, Trudy relies on money from the bank, her friends, her sister, a community group for women, and a psychologist whom she sees regularly.

Trudy's youngest child is in full-time daycare. The older children go to before and after school care. They bus from the daycare to school, and back to daycare again after school. On the weekends, Trudy's niece baby sits while Trudy grocery shops.

Trudy described a tight day-to-day schedule during the school year. She gets up at 7:00, gets herself and children dressed (they all get their clothes ready the night before). They leave the house by 7:30 and the children eat breakfast at daycare. After she drops the children off, she takes the bus to school, and starts class at 9:00. She picks the children up sometime after 4:30. In the evening she cooks dinner, the children play a bit, they get ready for the next day, and all go to bed by 8:00 or 8:30. Saturday is laundry day (the house is a mess and the laundry is piled high by the weekend), and Sunday is grocery shopping day. Sunday afternoon they listen to music together. Other than that, they have little recreation time together. Sunday night Trudy takes some time to collect her thoughts and get herself ready for the next work week.

Trudy feels positive about her future. She indicated a strong sense of need to get ahead. Trudy indicated that she likes being interviewed: she stated that it helped her to improve her interview skills.

Bonnie

Bonnie is a 26-year old Caucasian woman with two children, ages 6, 3, and one on the way. She has a grade 12 education and two semesters training as a nursing assistant. She has also taken a course to become a doula. She has worked for short periods of time as a farm hand, in an art store, and as a chambermaid. She enjoys writing poetry, and volunteers with an anti-poverty group.

Bonnie has been on social assistance most of her life, as a child with her parents, and now as an adult. She was off SFI for awhile when she got a student loan to do nursing assistant training. However, she quit this program after some conflict with the instructor. She also feels that the medical system is flawed and doesn't want to contribute to that. She also went off of assistance for awhile after she left her abusive boyfriend (she stole some money from him and lived off that for awhile).

After I met Bonnie, she met a new boyfriend and became pregnant. Her boyfriend and his brother moved in with her and her two children. SFI and the public housing personnel did not know this. She expressed mixed feelings about her relationship with her boyfriend and her pregnancy. Although she thought he was a nice guy, she felt somewhat smothered by him. She was apprehensive about having another child.

When I first met Bonnie she was in a part-time employability program for high-barrier women. Her income was derived solely from SFI at that time. Later in the year, she obtained an ACE position, in which she was paid $6.20 an hour at the agency where she was doing the employability program. When I last saw her, she had completed her ACE position, and was on EI maternity leave.

Bonnie's SFI income (with child tax) was $1085 per month. When she started her ACE position working at the organization where she did her employability program, she was making $6.20 per hour at 35 hours per week, totalling $1230 with the child tax benefit. When she finished her ACE position in May, and went onto maternity leave, EI, she was making $1050 with child tax. However, since January, she was doing a little better financially, because her new boyfriend Peter has been buying most of the groceries. Also, because Bonnie didn't tell CRH that Pete and his brother moved in with her, her rent didn't increase. Bonnie felt bad about not telling them; however, they couldn't afford the increase in rent, as they were barely scraping by as it was.

Bonnie has a number of health problems. She and her children are all celiac, so require a wheat-free diet. She could get extra money from SFI for their special diet, but the forms are so ridiculous that she has yet to fill them out. Bonnie experiences depression, and went on medication for this during the year that I met with her. She has been in an abusive relationship previously.

When I asked Bonnie what she thought contributed to a healthy lifestyle, she said "a good job" so that she can afford decent housing, a comfortable environment, and vacations. Bonnie indicated that SFI is enough to live on, but not enough for any extra recreation or travel. She thinks that recreation is important for her children, believing that her children will miss out on important opportunities without recreational experiences.

Bonnie has had extensive child welfare involvement. She has never had her children apprehended, but has been monitored closely.

When asked about her transition from welfare to work, Bonnie indicated that she thinks she "has a firmer grasp on reality". She feels that she's matured because now she's thinking long-term, whereas before she only thought short term. However, she doesn't know what she wants to do for a job. Interestingly, when I asked Bonnie to reflect on her transition from welfare to work, she said that it has been less the welfare-to-work transition, and more other life circumstances, that have caused her stress such as an unplanned pregnancy and extended family issues.

Karen

Karen is an 18-year old Caucasian woman with a two-year old son. Karen had her son when she was 16. She lives at home with her mom – always has – in a low-income rental unit. For awhile, Karen's boyfriend also lived with Karen and her mom. However, Karen and her boyfriend broke-up and he moved out. Karen has a grade 9 education.

Karen went onto SFI when she was 16 year old – six months after her son was born. She could not get SFI on her own as she was a minor – but she was able to get it with her boyfriend. When she turned 18, she was able to get SFI on her own. However, she only qualified for partial benefits, as she was living with her mom. Therefore, SFI did not cover her rent. She therefore received $305 from SFI plus a full daycare subsidy. SFI also paid the parent portion of her daycare fee (about $125).

When I first met Karen, she had just started a job in retail. She was working 25 hours a week for $6 per hour. In subsequent interviews, her job continued. In the second interview, she indicated she was now making $7 per hour, working 40 hours per week, and in the last interview she was making $8 per hour, working 40 hours per week. She was promoted to supervisor when she got full-time hours. After one year of work, she will receive benefits.

For most of her employment, she worked the evening shift. This provided challenges on two fronts. First, her daycare was open from 6am- 6pm and her work was from 4-12. So, she put her son in daycare in the early afternoon, and her mom picked him up after work and took care of him in the evening. To qualify for her subsidy, she was required to have her son in daycare 100 hours a week. So, she ended up putting him in daycare when she could have had him at home with her. Second, she had to walk home from her job at night. It was a short walk – only 5-10 minutes, but it entailed walking past several bars late at night and she was nervous about this.

Karen's mom pays for the rent, and Karen buys all the food, pays her daycare parent portion, and buys everything for her son. She finds she is out of money by the end of the month.

Karen has some outstanding bills owing to the telephone company and the daycare from a number of years back. Other than this, she is debt free. She relies on her mom a lot to help her out with childcare, financial viability, and support. Besides her mom, she has few other supports and few friends. She indicated she is very isolated.

Karen indicated that her health is not very good. She describes herself as exhausted, tired a lot, and a poor sleeper. She indicated that she hardly eats and has no time for self. She states that she is sick frequently, with strep throat. She also indicated that her doctor is trying to figure out what is wrong with her. She had a uterine infection for awhile, and feels she may still have some kind of infection which tires her. She stated in her last interview that her stomach hurts all the time. She is undergoing tests. She describes her life in poverty as stressful and embarrassing.

Her future plans entail going to school to get her high school education. She wants to become a social worker, and during my last interview with her, she was planning to start taking one class per term to upgrade.

Karen was disillusioned with the welfare system. She indicated that "they should understand where people are coming from". She felt that they didn't want her to succeed, and put roadblocks in her way. She described the transition from welfare to work as very difficult. She indicated that in some ways she was happier, and in other ways more depressed. She described being on welfare as having absolutely no money, but when she works she has no time with her son.

She feels that her relationship with her son is positive, although she thinks she spoils him to make up for not being there, and that he is very possessive. She doesn't feel she spends enough time with him. She indicated that her day-to-day schedule is exhausting, getting up early to be with her son and then going to work for the evening shift. She has no time for self.

Karen gave a good description of the roadblocks of poverty. She describes how she needed a bed for her son because he was able to get out of his crib at an early age, but she couldn't afford a bed and SFI wouldn't give her money for him. Consequently, her son sleeps with her in a single bed, which is a poor sleeping arrangement.

She describes her life as better now than a year ago. She indicates that she wants to work because she likes doing things. She feels that a mom needs more than to be at home, going "insane".

Shelley

Shelley is a 22-year old woman with a one-year old daughter. She has a grade 12 education, plus one year of university. She has very little work experience. She went onto SFI when she was 7 months pregnant with her daughter. Shelley described her childhood as difficult. She had a schizophrenic mother, a lot of instability, and child welfare involvement.

When I first met Shelley, she was in an employability program for high-barrier abused women to which she was referred by her social worker. After attending that program for three months, Shelley received a student loan, getting about $1100 to $1200 per month and started university. She completed one year of part-time studies, and then relocated to another city when the second term was over. She left the city because she was feeling stressed, needed a change, and was experiencing some harassment from her ex-partner with whom she was in an abusive relationship before her daughter was born.

Shelley has suffered from depression and anxiety, and has been on medication for this, but doesn't wish to be on medication anymore. Before relocating, she attended counselling with a student psychologist at the university. Her basic approach to life is that one has to have a positive attitude to overcome your circumstances, and this is the way in which she wanted to address her depression.

When I first met Shelley, she was living in a residence for single mothers who needed a safe, supportive environment. While she had her own apartment, she had the safety of living in this residence. Shelley had little other support. She indicated that she received emotional support from her sister, but other than this she was on her own. Her daughter was in full-time daycare. While it was adequate, Shelley would have liked to put her in a better daycare, but she couldn't afford it. Shelley currently has the following debts: $5600 for her student loan, $180 for her power, $280 for her phone bill, and $250 to her sister.

When Shelley completed the university year, she had to go back onto SFI because she had used up her loan funds. When she received her first SFI cheque she was told she'd have to find a job right away. She was discouraged and she decided to look for a fresh start. She thus used this money to buy a bus ticket to another city in another province. After spending a month in a shelter for abused women, Shelley was placed in a supportive residence for single mothers with young children. Here, she was involved in group therapy and gardening. She is living on social assistance again, which is $835 a month, of which $520 went towards rent and utilities. Although she couldn't afford to buy clothes, a bus pass, or any other items, she had enough money left over for food.

When asked about her experience with the employability program she was in, Shelley indicated that it was "a wonderful step" and a place where there was "minimal judgement". She thought the personal development piece of the program was very helpful, although difficult because it was so emotional. She felt it was insensitive, however, how they began to open up a bunch of issues, and then quickly moved them into job search. She also felt that the job search wasn't very good because it just focused on getting any kind of job, not helping them get jobs which they would love.

When asked how she felt about the future, Shelley said "I just live life moment by moment". Like many other participants, it seemed that Shelley found it more manageable to live day to day, rather than look too far into the future.

When asked about how she felt about the interviewing process for this research project, she indicated that "it was cool" because she "had a voice". She also said "by talking to you, I'm helping you and me, and maybe more people".

Carrie

Carrie is a 33-year old Métis woman with 3 children. She has a grade 12 education and some nursing assistant training. When I first met Carrie, she was in an employability program for abused women. In my last interview with her, she was working part-time in a nursing home, making over $12 per hour, plus shift differential. Carrie lives in a townhouse which is not subsidized. She pays $555 per month for her rent. She really likes her neighbourhood, and is pleased to not live in subsidized housing.

There are substantial health issues in this family. Carrie herself has asthma, smokes, is overweight, and has a gambling addiction. She is stressed and exhausted, although still hopeful about the future. Her children have extensive problems. Her daughter had open heart surgery as a preschooler because she had a large hole in her heart. Her oldest son is bipolar and suffers from anxiety and depression (he is on medication for these issues). Her younger son suffers from depression anxiety, and schizophrenic tendencies. He is also on medication. One of her sons has obsessive-compulsive behaviours. Her sons have gone for assessment and treatment, and both see a psychiatrist. They go to many specialist appointments to deal with their health problems.

Carrie has several child care arrangements. Her daughter goes to full-time daycare, and her boys go to after-school care. During the week she has to be at work by 7:00, so she walks with her children to the nearby gas station at 6:15 am. Her children go into the gas station, and she gets on the bus at 6:20. At 6:30 the daycare opens, and her children walk across the parking lot to the daycare. If she works evenings or weekends, she has a friend, the son of a friend, or her ex-husband care for her children. She tries to spend time with her children in the evening. She talks to them at supper time, plays games with them, and bakes them their favourite food.

Carrie joined a church which gives her support and excellent food hampers. Her ex-husband provides some childcare, and her aunt is sometimes supportive. She used to pawn things to get money, and she recently declared bankruptcy because she had a $13,000 debt. She still has to pay legal aid back.

She tries to go to bed by 7:00 or 7:30 as she has to get up at 5:00 for her job. She gets everything organized before the children get up as she has to be out of the door by 6:15.

Although she's exhausted, she feels that she's better off than a year ago. Her husband doesn't control her anymore, and she loves her job.

Danielle

Danielle is a 37-year old Caucasian woman with a two year old daughter. She's been on social assistance for approximately two years. This is her first experience on social assistance. She went onto social assistance after leaving an abusive relationship. Prior to moving in with her ex-common-law partner and having a child, Danielle worked in a full-time job at a grocery chain, making $16 per hour. She quit this job after meeting her common-law partner and having her baby, because she didn't think she'd need it anymore. However, things did not work out. Danielle has some university education, and a certificate in secretarial services and cosmetology. She cannot do secretarial work now, because she lacks computer skills, and she didn't like cosmetology.

When Danielle left her common-law partner, she relocated to the city where her parents lived. Her mom had recently died, and she went to live with her dad. Soon, he also became very sick, and died a few months later. Danielle lived in her parents' house, but the house was for sale and once it sold she knew she'd have to move. She paid rent to her sister, who was the executor to the will. During this time, she applied for SFI, because she had no income. She was cut-off of SFI, however, for non-compliance, because she failed to find a job within a specified job frame. Danielle described in detail, however, how difficult it was to find a job due to limited options because of childcare. Retail jobs, etc. entail shift work and she did not have extra-hours childcare. Eventually, she got some inheritance money, and was living on that when I met her. Prior to that, she had been enrolled in a full-time employability program, but she didn't get a job following this program.

Danielle continues to move in and out of her relationship. She knows it won't work out, but when she gets desperate, she goes back to him. It never lasts long. When I last spoke to her, she indicated that she was trying to gain control and let him go. However, she also said that he provides a lot of financial child support, and this is important for her.

Danielle and her daughter do not have any physical health problems. However, Danielle indicated that just before the first interview I had with her, she had a mental health assessment and she was diagnosed with a personality disorder. Her understanding of this disorder was that she is unable to hang onto jobs or relationships very long. She didn't think that was fair, however, given that she'd had one job for four years.

Danielle talked a lot about how one can't live on a low income. Because she's had a sufficient income in the past, she felt particularly strongly that it was impossible to live on SFI, or a low-paying job. Consequently, she constantly spent more than she had, and this had financial consequences for her. At one time, she declared bankruptcy.

During the year I interviewed Danielle, she relocated to another province to reconcile with her boyfriend. This did not last long (one month). She ended up going to a shelter, and then getting her own place to live. She was on and off assistance a few times, depending on when she got another instalment of inheritance money. When I last spoke to her, she was trying to get into a 10 month program to do early childhood education. She didn't really want to go back to school, but had been unable to find work, and needed the money. If she went back to school, she was hopeful that she could get student funding, some of which she'd have to pay back.

When I asked her how the welfare-to-work transition had impacted her well-being, she said that it had not been positive. She described how looking for work for months and not getting anything had a negative impact on her self-esteem. She felt that social workers really did not have a realistic understanding of the challenges faced in looking for work.

When I asked her what it was like to go through the interviewing process, she said two things: first, it was hard to remember events and put them into words, and somewhat embarrassing because she'd been in a bad state.

Sarah

Sarah is a 40-year old aboriginal woman with one two year old child. She has a grade 10 education through an upgrading college. She has been on SFI consistently since 1998, when she got pregnant with her daughter. At that time, she broke her foot, and was on bed rest for the majority of her pregnancy. She has been on SFI medical status for some of the time she's been on assistance since 1998. Prior to going onto SFI, Sarah worked in oil camps as a cook. This was seasonal work, and throughout the years she has been on SFI here and there. She made good money in the camps, but can't go back to that now, because of childcare for her daughter, and a chronic back problem. I met Sarah in an employability program for abused women.

Sarah has a number of health problems. She has asthma, is overweight and has a chronic back problem. She also stated that she had "stress problems". She also has a history of domestic violence with the father of her daughter. Her daughter is generally healthy, although has suffered from problems with low iron.

In the fall of 2001, Sarah got a job working in a school cafeteria. She was working five days a week, five hours a day, making $7 per hour. She grossed about $700 per month. She did this job for a number of months until she got laid off. She had been filling-in during a strike. Doing this job didn't get her any further ahead financially. She indicated that one month she got a cheque from SFI for $9 because of the income she was making in her job. Because the job was across the city, Sarah had to ride the bus 1.5 hours each way to get to her employment.

When asked about how she manages, Sarah indicated that she doesn't pay her bills in full. She just puts a little money on each bill to prevent getting cut-off. She appears to have little support. She is angry that her daughter's father is not required to help her out with child maintenance. He is on SFI medical status, and even though he doesn't have childcare responsibilities, he gets more money than she does. For recreation, Sarah said that they watch TV, play games and have pillow fights. One in awhile, Sarah will go out with some friends for a few drinks. She indicated that she is unable to afford a bus pass or recreation. She indicated that her daughter would rather be with her God parents than with Sarah, because they had more money and could spoil her with gifts and good food and a backyard with grass. This was very hurtful to Sarah.

Sarah has a full childcare subsidy. She picked the daycare for location. However, when it's really cold, she refuses to take her daughter to daycare. She doesn't think it's good for her to be outside when it is so cold, so they just stay home.

When asked about the future, Sarah had difficulty responding. She stated that she hoped to get some computer skills and work as a secretary.

Melanie

Melanie is a 34-year old Caucasian woman with six children. Melanie had all six of her children apprehended awhile ago. She got two of them back – the youngest and oldest. She has a grade 7 education with some math and English upgrading. She also has a criminal record. She has limited work experience – she worked in a sandwich shop for a few months, and also did some housekeeping work briefly. Melanie has been on welfare all of her life. She was first on assistance with her mother, and then got her own file when she became an adult. She had a few brief periods when she wasn't on welfare, when she was married.

Melanie describes her health as fine. She indicates that she sometimes experiences being "low", but is not medicated for this. She has a skin condition and back pain as well. She indicates that the two children living with her are healthy. In order to save money and feed her children, Melanie doesn't start eating until 3:00 each day – she drinks milk for breakfast, coffee for lunch, and then eats later in the day.

When I met Melanie she was starting a one year full-time employability program. She was hopeful about getting a good job upon completing the program. She was very positive about the employability program she was in, stating that it helped her to improve her self-esteem. Throughout the year, however, I noticed a change in her perspective. In the second interview, she was very positive, because she indicated that she enjoyed the program, and had more money from student finance. However, in the last interview there was a definite shift. She was discouraged with the program because they indicated that she could get any job she wanted to, and then later told her to take any job she could get. She stated that she, like others, were delaying getting a job until the very end of the program, because she knew she could never make as much working as she could get on student finance.

Natalia

Natalia is a 30-year old aboriginal woman with 4 children, ages 9, 7, 3, and 2. She finished high school and went to one year of college to get her training to be an early childhood worker. She has been on SFI since her oldest son, Ryan, was a small baby. She isn't sure what she would like to do for work. She worked as a childcare worker for a while in 1995 or 1996 and this is the extent of her work history.

At the beginning of the year in which I interviewed her, Natalia had started the six-month employability program because her SFI worker told her that she had to or she would get cut-off of SFI. She didn't want to go, but she felt she had to. She said that even after being in the program for two weeks, she already liked it and looked forward to the future. She said the first week was awful because they talked about abuse issues and she didn't like it. She said her boyfriend, who doesn't live with her, is verbally abusive which she doesn't consider abuse.

On SFI, Natalia received $602 a month, plus they paid her rent directly. She also received child tax which is more than SFI (approximately $750). She had trouble paying her bills. Sometimes she put her children in camp, swimming, etc. and then ran out of money for power, etc. She didn't have a phone for most of the year in which I kept contact with her. One of the children' dad's pays maintenance but that went straight to the government. Going to the six-month program didn't change her financial status at all. She was hoping to get onto student finance because it would pay more but her social worker said she couldn't do that on this program.

I asked her what the transition was like to go from being home every day to going to a daily program. She said that it wasn't a difficult transition because the real transition in her life was quitting drugs, which she did a couple of years ago. However, she also indicated that she found it stimulating to go to the program. I asked how it was for her children. She said that she had difficulty keeping the two older ones in after school care, because they would just leave the school. The two younger ones cried everyday when she left to go to school. She wasn't sure about the quality of the daycare but she says the children hadn't complained of being hurt or anything so she'd try it for awhile.

Part-way through the year, Natalia quit her program and was subsequently cut-off SFI for non-compliance. She said that she didn't like the program because of the focus on abuse, and she missed too many days because her children her sick. After she was cut-off SFI, she lived on the child tax benefit and borrowed money for about six months. In my last interview with her, she had been accepted into the one-year employability program, and was excited because she would now receive student-finance funding.

The health status of Natalia and her children is relatively poor. Natalia was run over by a car a couple of years ago (the police suspect her boy-friend was the offender although this was never proven). She broke her leg and was badly hurt. She still finds it hard to sit for a long time. She gets out of bed slowly. She thinks this will affect her ability to work for long periods of time (more than 3 hours). Natalia indicated that her two older children are violent. She has had extensive child welfare involvement although they've never taken her children. Her two older children have oppositional defiance disorder (ODD) and attention deficit and hyper-activity disorder (ADHD) and both are medicated for this. She feels they are doing better as she's got some parenting tips from child welfare and she keeps them busy in soccer and camp, and swimming. Her youngest has sever asthma.

She wants her children to get off social assistance and have a better life.

Loreen

Loreen is a 29-year old aboriginal woman with two children, ages 4 and 9. She has a grade 12 education and two years of university towards a degree in health administration. She has very little work experience – she worked for awhile as a chamber maid a number of years ago. She has a criminal record which is now eligible for pardon, but she needs $30 to pay the administration fee, and hasn't been able to do this yet.

When I met Loreen she was starting an employability program for high-barrier women leaving abusive relationships. She was SFI medical status prior to entering this program, and she said that her ECSS worker didn't require her to go into the program. Rather, she wanted to start the program in order to "do something". However, later, when she wished to quit the program, she was told that this would jeopardize her SFI benefits. So, she felt pressure to remain in the program, for fear of losing her funding.

Loreen suffers from clinical depression, and was on a number of different medication throughout the year I met her, to try to stabilize her condition. She also went to regular counseling appointments, which were paid by her treaty. She also informed me that she is an alcoholic. She had been dry about 10 months when I first met her, and continued to be so. She went to AA to offer support for this. Loreen's children were generally healthy, although her youngest son had some sort of speech problem which he had been referred to a special school to address.

Loreen gave a good description of how she survives on a limited income. She does not buy any clothes; she only buys apples and bananas for fruit; she avoids "free" festivals because of all the things her children want to have when they are there such as ice cream. She pays parts of bills, but not all; she is part of a bread coop to get inexpensive bread; she does not eat meat so that her children can eat tuna; she cancelled her cable to cut-down on utilities, although she described TV as a major source of recreation for her family.

Loreen indicated that her general family-functioning improved while she was in the employability program. The reason for this was that her family had a routine, a reason to get up, and a reason to be organized. Also, she felt that her children excelled in daycare. She indicated that while she was in her program, her eldest son seldom missed school.

Loreen's transition from welfare to work did not materialize. She went from SFI medical status to the employability program, which she completed, back onto SFI medical status. She suffered severe depression while going through this process, which seemed to peak about half-way through the year in which I interviewed her. She indicated that she was very disappointed in her inability to move forward – she really believed that she would have a good office job upon completing her program, and as it was, she didn't even get an interview. She felt that she let down her children. When I met her the last time, her emotional well-being was much improved, although her circumstances hadn't changed. She attributed this, with humour, to her new medication. She felt that although nothing had really changed, she was coping better and had more hope. Although she was disappointed in the employability program, she felt that it helped her to see what she needed to do to improve her situation.

When asked about policy issues, Loreen indicated that, while she was grateful for SFI money, she felt it wasn't enough to make ends meet, and that there was no financial incentive to work part-time to supplement SFI income, as a person would simply have earned income taken off her SFI cheque.

Dana

Dana is a 26-year old aboriginal woman with two young children. She relocated to the city after leaving her abusive common-law partner. She has her grade 12 equivalency, which she called an integrated occupational program. Her previous work experience includes working as a childcare worker, dishwasher, housekeeper, car detailer, and flower arranger. Overall, she does not have a lot of work experience. During the time I knew her, Dana worked on Friday and Saturdays at a carwash, doing detailing. She left this job after 7 months. Dana has been on SFI since December of 2000. In June, 2001, she went onto student finance to attend a one year employability program. She indicates that she likes student finance better than SFI because it provides extra money, it means you're doing something, and you don't have to fill out client cards. In my final interview with Dana, she was back on SFI again, and working part-time doing janitorial work in the daycare where her children attended, approximately 19 hours per week, making $6 per hour. She hopes to get a job restoring cars.

Dana describes the health of herself and her children as good. They do not get sick very often, and have no major health complications. Both of Dana's children have speech impediments, and her son, the older child, will be attending a special school to address this. Her son has behavioural problems, and has been diagnosed with PDD and ODD. She received support from Handicapped Children's Services. She indicated that her children had really benefited from childcare – their speech had improved.

Dana's children are both in a subsidized daycare near her home. She found this daycare through shopping around. She found it was the best one because it was clean and they did neat things with the children. When Dana works on Saturday, another welfare-to-work participant cares for her children. She pays this person $3 per hour to baby sit.

Dana indicated that she receives support from her parents, although they live in another town. She also received childcare help from a friend in her employability program, and support from HCS.

When I asked Dana about her transition from welfare to work in the last year, she indicated that it was not very good. She didn't feel that the program she was in really helped her move forward. However, she did indicate that it helped her to see what she needed to do – get more education. She felt that more focus on computer skills, and less focus on life skills would have been more beneficial.

Tamara

Tamara is a 30-year old Caucasian woman with two children. She has a grade 12 education and some training to be a legal assistant. She has worked as a music promoter and singer in a band. She can't do this now do to her children's needs. She has been on SFI a few times in the past for short periods, when she and her husband would split up. Most recently, she went on SFI when her marriage ended (about a year and a half ago).

When I first met Tamara, she had just begun a year long employability program. Upon entering this program, Tamara's income source changed from SFI to student finance. This increased her total income from approximately $1000 to $1600. When I first interviewed Tamara, she was very enthusiastic about the employability program. The program started with personal development and emotions management, and Tamara felt she was learning a lot about herself, as well as interacting with other adults. However, for the second and third interviews, she was less enthusiastic about her program. While she always maintained that the first part of the program was beneficial, she found other parts of the program discouraging. She didn't need to learn resume writing, and felt that her time could have been used more wisely. In my last interview with Tamara, she was quite frustrated with her program. She was off of student finance and back on SFI, which meant her income dropped significantly again – and she still didn't have a job. In order to quality for SFI benefits, she was required to attend her employability program each morning from 9-11 for job search. She felt this was ridiculous, because that was the time that she should be out pounding the pavement, submitting resumes to employers. She felt that going to employers in the afternoon implied that she was lazy and unmotivated, and that they would never hire her. Tamara described how she needs a job that fits within daycare hours, and how this is difficult. She plans to go to school in the fall, to take an English course, and work part-time.

Tamara talked about how having more money on student finance improved her quality of life. She said that it reduced her worry and stress; helped her to be able to give her children more things (like take them to McDonald's once in awhile); and buy better food, especially fresh fruit and vegetables.

When asked about health, Tamara described her health as adequate, although she has had some trouble. She suffers from panic attacks, and was on paxil for this problem. However, she is also allergic to mosquitoes, and developed a serious lung infection which she could not adequately treat due to being on paxil. Eventually, she went off of paxil in order to start medication for the lung infection. She still gets panic attacks, but is managing better. Tamara's daughters both have asthma, and one is at risk for cystic fibrosis. She will know in three years whether or not she has cystic fibrosis for sure. In the meantime, her daughter has to go to a lot of specialist appointments.

Tamara describes her family functioning as adequate, although when attending the program full-time she didn't feel she spent enough time with her children – only the weekends. For recreation, Tamara plays games with her children, takes them to the park and takes them to the mall. While Tamara was first very enthusiastic about daycare, she ended up pulling her children from daycare. She thought they were better off at home, and didn't think they should have to be dragged off to daycare everyday. Also, the daycare napped her youngest daughter, and this was detrimental, as her daughter would not sleep at night if she napped during the day. Towards the end of the interview process, Tamara and her neighbour were swapping babysitting and this was working well.

Tamara described positive social support. Her parents and her sister are very supportive, her friends give her emotional support, and her neighbours help with childcare. Her husband doesn't visit the children very much.

Tamara indicated that she dropped out of her legal assistant course because her daughter was very sick at the time. Now, however, she has an outstanding student loan (@ $ 7000) and can't return to school. She also indicated that she missed some time at her employability program because her daughter was sick and had many appointments (and she let her case manager know) and yet she almost got kicked-out of her program.

When asked about her future, Tamara says that she generally feels positive. While she doesn't feel she has a lot of control over her future, she still feels that things will be okay.

Mel

Mel is a 34-year old aboriginal man with one preschool daughter. He has a grade 12 education and one year of university. He has a scattered work history. He worked one year at a lumber camp upon leaving high school. He then hurt his back and had to leave that job. He went to university three years at different times, but wasn't able to continue the last two years he tried – the first time due to low grades, and the second time due to burnout. He worked full-time at a grocery store for 2. 5 years. He enjoyed this job but had to leave due to childcare considerations. He gained custody of his daughter after he split up with his wife. Because his job started at 4:00 am, he couldn't secure childcare and after not showing up a few mornings, was fired. He also worked as a substitute teacher on a reserve for a year. Between jobs and university, Mel has been on SFI or EI.

Mel started a one-year long employability program on his own initiative. At the time, he was on SFI medical status for his back condition. However, when he relocated to Edmonton, he searched for a program. He went to one job-search organization, and was referred to the employability program where I met him. His ECSS worked helped get him registered in the program. Upon starting this program, he was able to switch to student finance funding, which gave him almost twice as much income as SFI. He indicated that this helped him to buy more groceries, and have more recreational opportunities with his daughter, such as taking the bus to a mall to go to movies.

Mel's daughter is healthy with no apparent health conditions. Mel himself, however, has various health limitations. He is epileptic, and has been on medication for this for many years. He also experiences depression, and has been on paxil for this condition for several years. He has also been in treatment a number of times for a drinking problem, although he does not see himself as having a drinking problem at this time, although he is late for work sometimes after going out drinking. Mel was also diagnosed with a learning disability. Mel didn't know what the disability was called, but stated that he had great difficulty concentrating on things. He also has a bad back which precludes him from doing hard labour.

Mel indicates that he gets most of his support from his parents – his dad, whom he lives with, and his mom who lives out of town. They both buy him food and other items, and his dad provides childcare when needed. Mel and his daughter live with Mel's dad and two cousins. They share the rent and utility bills. Mel's father buys most of the food for Mel and his daughter, and takes them out to eat once in awhile. He also gives them rides. Mel also sees a psychologist every month, although he indicates that it isn't that helpful to him, as he feels the same way the minute he leaves the office, as he did when he entered it.

When asked about the effectiveness of his employability program, Mel gave a mixed answer. On the one hand, he feels that some of the classes weren't necessary. On the other hand, he feels that the program offered him a chance to get to know others, to get out of the house, and to get some confidence. Breaking the isolation he experienced before entering the program seemed to be the most important aspect of the program for Mel.

During the last month of his program, Mel was able to secure a full-time job through the assistance of his caseworker. At first he didn't take the job, because it started at 7:00 am, and his daughter's daycare didn't open until 7:00. However, after a few weeks, he was offered a job at the same sight which began at 7:30. He took that job. He now works 44 hours a week, at $8.50 per hour. If he can be on-time for two weeks in a row, he gets an extra dollar per hour for that two week period. After two months at the job, he had not been able to get that extra money yet.

Mel is happy with his daughter's daycare. He chose it because it was close by. They give her breakfast and lunch and she likes it there, although the first month was difficult for her. The daycare is subsidized – he pays a $80 per month parent portion to have his daughter attend there.

Mel describes his parent-child interaction as adequate. He worries that he doesn't really know how to parent, but feels his daughter is doing well. He thinks that the interaction is better now than before his program. His daughter is doing well in daycare, and although he is tired at the end of the day, he thinks their interaction is positive because he appreciates the time he has with her.

When asked about policy issues, Mel indicated that he thinks that there should be more jobs available that offer better wages, so that a person can afford to work, pay their bills, and pay for childcare.

Mel feels nervous about the future. He hopes he can offer his daughter a good future, but he is unsure about how it will unfold.

Samantha

Samantha is a 31-year old Caucasian woman with a one-year old son. Samantha has a grade 11 education and has been on and off SFI for many years. During the time that I knew Samantha, she completed a one year course and obtained her certification to be a legal assistant. When I last met with her, she had obtained a full-time job as a legal assistant, making $22,300 a year with benefits, working Monday to Friday, 7:30-3:30. After two months she resigned from this job, however, and accepted a six month contract doing data entry with similar wages and hours. She left her first job because she could not work with her boss. Samantha also worked on Saturdays at a restaurant to supplement her income. Even with these two jobs, child tax, and subsidized housing, she was still having trouble making ends meet.

Samantha has her son in a top-notch childcare facility. She has to pay extra for this – she ends up paying an extra $277 parent portion even with a full subsidy. However, she feels it's worth it, because she wants her son in a quality daycare. Her son is doing well.

Samantha has a number of health-related problems. Through self-advocacy, she managed to get blue-cross coverage so that she could purchase needed medication for herself. She is a recovering alcoholic and has been dry for a year now. She also struggles with bulimia. She describes herself as stressed and exhausted, as she tries to make a life for herself and her son. She has been on medication since her son was born to treat depression, and recently went off her medication to try to deal with issues with a clear head. She was in a very abusive relationship just prior to giving birth to her son. She gets sick frequently, and attributes this to exhaustion. Her son went through a stage this year where he got multiple ear infections.

Samantha describes her life as "pitching hay". She constantly struggles to pay her bills. She has done a number of things to make ends meet. She collected EI and SFI at the same time for awhile, because otherwise she couldn't pay her bills. When she began her current schooling, she went onto student finance funding. Her income went up to $1344, and then $1450, but it still wasn't enough. Now that she is working, she makes about the same amount of money after deductions. She has always supplemented her income by working a weekend job waitressing. She has never claimed tips for this job, as this is her diaper and milk money. She declared bankruptcy a number of years ago to clear her bills, and bargain shops to get the things she needs. She uses the food bank when necessary, and doesn't allow herself to look poor because she believes you "attract where you're at". To do this, she assures that she wears up-to-date (albeit bargain) clothes. For emotional support, she attends AA as many times a week as possible – this varies according to whether or not she has the energy and can get childcare. She calls her AA sponsor whenever she needs to, and finds her to be a great source of support. Her brother also helps her out when he comes to town, with driving her to discount supermarkets, and babysitting for her. When she's really in need of help, her mom comes from another province and stays with her. This is helpful, but also difficult because her mom stays in her apartment with her.

Samantha describes her parent-child interactions as generally positive, although she finds that she gets impatient with her son at times because she's so exhausted. She has self-educated herself about parenting, however, and feels that her son is thriving. She wishes that she had more support to help out with him, but she's doing the best she can on her own. She has no recreation time and sometimes feels trapped. She doesn't feel that she spends enough time with her son, between her full-time and part-time jobs.

Carla

Carla is a 35-year old aboriginal woman with three children, ages 5, 4, and 1-year old. She has a grade 12 education and two years of college training to be an administrative assistant. When I first met Carla she was separated from her husband, who is an alcoholic and emotionally abusive. However, when I interviewed Carla the second time, she had reconciled with her husband. He had stopped drinking, and she felt hopeful about the relationship.

Carla left her husband in April, went onto SFI for July and August. In September, she lost her SFI because she got a payback check from child tax for $1300. When she ran out of money in October, she didn't bother to reapply for SFI. When I first met Carla in October, she had just quit working at a retail clothing store 5 hours a day, 25 hours a week at 6.25 an hour. After she left her retail job, lived on child tax and money borrowed from family members for two months. She then got an administrative job at a college. This job was 12 hours a week, paying 12 dollars an hour. In December she also went back onto SFI to supplement her income. When Carla reconciled with her husband, he got a job which paid approximately $700 to $800 per month. They went off of SFI, and are now surviving on their combined incomes and child tax, which comes out to about $1800 per month. They can make ends meet on this.

Carla is still working 12 hours a week at the college – Tuesday, and Thursday morning, and all day Wednesday. She loves her job. She has autonomy, flexibility, and gets to do some creative things. She was also doing part-time work at another organization – working as a sales clerk. She got paid $7 per hour there. She only worked about one day a week – just filling in. She is done with that now.

Time together as a family is very important to Carla and she said she realized how good it was for the children last week when her daughter was trying to skate, constantly falling over, and said: 'mom, I am so happy'. As a family, they do things together – eat meals, go skating, go sledding, go to the park, go to church, go to visit relatives and friends.

Carla has several sisters who live near by whom she is close to. She is very involved in the church. The church and her sisters offer an environment which is very supportive, and where there is no alcohol. Her husband comes to church with her now, which is very important to her. She felt she had lots of positive support from people who don't drink and this makes her happy. She attributes her happiness to her faith.

Carla is starting to be a mentor at the local school. She will spend one hour a week reading to a child, and spending time with them in the school environment. She said that she wants to give back to children whose parents can't spend as much time with them (ie., single moms).

Carla feels she has control over organizing her day and managing her everyday life. She said there are things none of us can control and that's life.

I asked her how the interview process was. She said it was good. She said it was thought-provoking and helped her to see how she had changed because I asked questions one wouldn't normally think about as one goes through day- to-day life. I asked her if it felt invasive and she said no, because she knew that she could trust me.